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## THE MYSTERY IN PALACE GARDENS.

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### CHAPTER X.

#### IN THE FOREST.

WHEN a man falls into arrears with his conscience it is for much the same reason as that which gets him into trouble with his creditors. In both cases he fails to look affairs in the face : in the one, he declines to ask himself where he is going ; in the other, how he stands.

Drifting is as common in morals as in trade ; and in morals, as in trade, the practice generally ends in bankruptcy.

Mr. Hay had got a good deal behind with his conscience ; and now, when suddenly the book lay open before him, and he was forced to glance at his position, to cast his eyes upon the meagre credits and the large debits that appeared upon the face of the account, he felt appalled.

For a time Conscience had it all her own way. ‘That is how you stand,’ she said, in those pitiless, uncompromising, matter-of-fact tones which she uses when she wakes a fellow up in the middle of the night, or runs straight at him while he is immersed in business or steeped in

pleasure, or wounds him sitting in his pew at church with some arrow shot at a venture by the preacher. There can be no question Conscience knows now and then how to deal a blow ; that there are times when she catches a man under the fifth rib, and stabs him to the heart.

Here was a victim to her liking ; unarmed and defenceless. He wore no mail-shirt of self-love, or proof-armour of righteousness. He was no hardened sinner, no unprincipled deceiver. His soul was tender, and his mind pure ; and it is not too much to say he recoiled with horror from the knowledge so suddenly revealed to him.

Yes, he loved the woman ; from that time forth there could be no deception about the matter. This was the key-note of the music which had, from the first, penetrated his innermost feelings with melancholy delight ; here was the reason of the contest that had been raging within his breast : he loved her. He had felt pity for the man ; but for the woman, love. There was no wrong in his pity ; but there was sin in his love. Loyalty and disloyalty,

friendship and treachery, the hand of a benefactor, the heart of a robber ! How should a man who, in his own person, combined all these contradictory attributes, and harboured such conflicting sentiments, rest in peace ? How ? He knew now he had not so rested ; that life of late had been uneasy and unsatisfactory ; that the dual existence he had been leading was a source of perpetual strife and self-deception ; and that if he was to do any good for the future, to bring a disengaged mind to his business, and feel any pleasure in his leisure hours, he must turn his back on the East of London, and cast behind him the temptation that dwelt there.

It was not too late. Thankfully he repeated that sentence over and over again ; he had dallied with nothing save his own sense of right, striven to deceive nothing except his own conscience. It was not too late !

Swish, over the dead leaves and the rotten twigs and the withered ferns that lay thick on the ground, came a flying footfall. Under the arching trees, along one of the long aisles in that green cathedral, he strode on, head drooping, heart sad, thoughts busy ; but fast though he walked, the rapid footsteps followed faster. Swiftly if he likes, a man may stride through life ; but he never can escape the consequences of his own acts once they begin to hurry after him. Shod with seven-league boots they rush along, and though he may seem to have left all chance of such pursuit behind, they are following, and will come up with him some day.

Someday ! For this man, fleeing already in imagination from the evil he could not endure to contemplate, that day had already dawned.

Ah, what a dreary waste of

hours and minutes and seconds it proved ! It lengthened into years, during the course of which he walked over arid plains, and trod scorching ploughshares ; he drank the waters of affliction, and he ate his bread with tears.

His life ! He had meant to live it honestly, soberly, religiously ; he had so lived it through many an uneventful year ; and now he was at war with himself, at issue with all the instincts, prejudices, and habits of his education, because he had met in the morning twilight a woman exceeding beautiful, a woman most passing fair.

She was close upon him ; and yet still unwittingly he walked forward, busy with accusing thought. Lightly adown the grassy glades she sped on ; the branches of the trees met overhead, and interlaced themselves into arches open to the sky. Through the tracery of that marvellous roof the young moon shone fitfully ; now clear and cold, anon drifting behind some passing cloud.

' How fast you walk ! ' said Mrs. Palthorpe, panting a little as she came up with him.

He did not hear her ; absorbed in his own reflections, he did not know she was behind ; at that hour and in that part of the Forest he thought, if he thought at all, he must be quite alone.

She ran a few steps further, and laid her hand on his arm.

He turned and looked at her ; drew back with a gesture almost of dread ; uttered her name with a moaning cry, that he was unconscious of uttering, and reeled to the nearest tree, against which he leaned white and trembling, as though he had seen a ghost. Perhaps he had ; who can tell ? The events of the future may have cast an awful shadowy horror

before them, a terrible something, unseen by other eyes, unimagined by other hearts.

Mrs. Palthorpe looked at him in surprise.

'I have frightened you. I am so sorry. I did call to you; but I could not make you hear,' she said more eagerly, and with greater interest than she had ever evinced before.

Ere she finished her broken sentences he was himself again.

'You did startle me for a moment,' he answered. 'I never thought of meeting any one here.'

'I saw you turning into the Forest as I crossed over from the common,' she explained, 'and I followed, as I wanted to speak to you.'

'I regret you should have had so much trouble,' he said. 'If I had known—'

'Yes; but you see you could not know,' she interrupted hastily. 'I had not made up my own mind until I was coming home from Leytonstone, and then seeing you in the distance quite decided me.'

He scarcely knew what to answer.

'You should not have hurried so much; you are quite out of breath,' he remarked, taking refuge in an obvious platitude.

'I was afraid of not overtaking you,' she returned, 'and I wanted to say something to you particularly.'

'What is it?' he asked, and his voice sounded stern, by reason of the very repression he was putting upon it.

She stood silent for a moment; silent and still in the twilight of that winter evening.

Everything around was quiet as death. At that moment they might have been hundreds, thousands of miles distant from London. Even the hum of the great

city could not penetrate those bosky glades; not an echo of the million voices so close to them came floating through the long aisles, carpeted with green, roofed with boughs.

The moon looked down upon them: upon the man leaning half in shadow against a tree; upon the woman standing a few paces distant, with the light shining full across her face, giving to it an unearthly beauty, touching it with a pale ethereal loveliness.

He shivered, and drew closer still to the trunk of the tree. She hesitated; she had never been easy and ready in her speech towards any one. Words did not glide off her tongue nimbly, as is the case with most women. Though not in the least degree shy, she had the manner of one reserved, from whom expression only proceeded with a certain difficulty. A person speaking a foreign language imperfectly would have seemed to labour under the same sort of difficulty she experienced.

It all had its charm. When wedded to such beauty it was only another lever, not the less dangerous because it was one she herself felt as a defect.

Was it the place or the circumstances which also suddenly abashed her?—the cold dreamy questioning of the curious prying moon, the total loneliness, or an unaccustomed stiffness in Mr. Hay's bearing that caused her first to cast her eyes on the ground, and then to look timidly askance into the darker portions of the Forest, as she began,

'You will think me too bold, I am afraid; but I wanted to say I know now who sent that money.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes,' she went on hurriedly: 'I know you did. You, and none

other. I always thought it strange he had a friend. Poor people know no friends. Why you have been so good I cannot understand.'

He could. An hour ago the fact might have puzzled him; but it did not baffle him now.

'What makes you think I sent it?' he asked evasively.

'I do not think—I know,' she answered. 'If thinking could have told me whom it came from, I should have guessed long ago; but nobody ever finds out anything by thinking. I do not, at least. It all came to me in a minute this afternoon, just in a flash. "He sent it!" like that.'

In her eagerness and excitement she drew a step nearer to him; but he never moved. He only looked at her moonlit face, his own almost in shadow, feeling it could not be real; that it was not he, but some quite different person who stood within a magic circle in the depth of the wood, gazing upon this woman who had gained such possession of him!

'You will keep my secret?' he said at last hoarsely, his very voice sounding strange and unfamiliar in his ear.

'Trust me,' she answered, with that something in her tone and words and manner which jarred upon his finer susceptibilities. 'If he knew or suspected, he would never rest, or give anybody else rest. He could not bear to lie under the weight of such a burden. I do not mean it would be either worse or better coming from you than from anybody else. If I told him, he would fret till he was ill again. It is just because he cannot imagine where the money came from and who sent it, he says he is grateful. He would think he had accepted charity, if he fancied you gave it.'

'But he said distinctly this

afternoon he felt differently about such matters now,' urged Mr. Hay, dimly conscious it would have been kinder to give the injured man a letter to the hospital than in his weakness and extremity fetter him with such help as this.

'He said I' she repeated scornfully. 'O yes, I have heard all that, and understand how long it would last. You may think this a fine summer's evening if you like, Mr. Hay; but you cannot make me think it one. I know better. I know my husband, and you do not.'

He could not have told what he knew or what he did not. He was dazed and bewildered and wretched. The old strong feeling of sympathy with the man now seemed to have no separate existence apart from his love for the woman. He could not dissever them; he could not tell how much he had done for the first, or whether every kindly thought and generous act had been prompted by the second. He had but one desire left—to get away, to flee for his life, and escape while there was yet time. And she stood there, perfectly unconscious of his struggle, with the moonlight flickering through the branches, and shedding a weird glamour over the beautiful face that had bewitched and was enticing him to destruction.

'He is as proud as—' Mrs. Palthorpe did not finish her simile, but hurried on, feeling, apparently, she had narrowly escaped a stumble. 'They were all the same. It was only pride made the old gentleman cut him out of the property; only pride made Tom come up to London when he might have had a comfortable home at my grandfather's. People don't change in a minute; and you couldn't, as my aunt says, take the pride out of a Pal-

thorpe any more than you could thorns off a rose-tree. It is in the stock. They were proud at the beginning, and they'll be proud to the end.'

Yes, and it was this pride he had taken the surest subtlest means to wound. Better have left him alone—helped him instead to the hospital or the work-house, for that matter!

'I ventured to tell you this,' said Mrs. Palthorpe, 'and to ask you to be careful. The doctor cautioned me yesterday that any excitement might cause a relapse, and I am sure I don't know what would become of us if he got thrown back again. As it is, the doctor says it will be long before he is fit for desk-work.'

'I am afraid it will,' agreed Mr. Hay gravely.

'I wish I could get something to do,' she said eagerly. 'I would rather be out than sitting idle at home all day. Aunt said I never should be of much use; but I think if some milliner would try me I could earn a little money. I have always trimmed my own bonnets.'

He moved hurriedly out of the shadow.

'You must not think of such a thing, Mrs. Palthorpe!' he exclaimed. 'And I cannot allow you to remain standing here any longer. I will walk back with you to the main road: it is getting too late and too cold for you to remain on this damp grass.'

Like an intermittent fever, another stage of his disease was on him now. Husband and wife were so helpless he could not cast them off. Evidently there existed no danger so far as she was concerned. No one but a coward would turn away from people in such extremity. He would clothe himself in triple armour, and instead of fleeing temptation, resist it. A

milliner's assistant! His whole nature arose in revolt, a spasm of jealousy shook his soul, as he thought of simpering exquisites and battered *routés* making pretexts to see the lovely shopwoman. He must contrive some means of support for them, something which, while considering the husband's spirit of independence, should deliver the wife from sordid cares and preserve her from degradation.

He was a clever man of business; but he did not know much about women. He had still to learn how difficult it is to degrade some of the sex or to preserve others.

'You need not turn back on my account,' she said. 'I shall get home quite safe, thank you; and she was genuine in this remark. She wanted his help, but she did not in the slightest degree desire his society. Not that she objected to it; she was simply indifferent. He could not help knowing that; he could not avoid seeing he had never caused a thought or awakened a feeling that might not have been published to the world. She did not long for his company, but he would not suffer her to go alone.

'She is perfectly guileless,' he considered; 'as fearless and as innocent as a child. I must help them, get them out of their present difficulties, and then—Good heavens! you are not hurt, I hope?' for suddenly she tripped over the root of one of the trees, and in a moment he had saved her from falling, and was supporting her as she cried aloud with pain.

'You are hurt; you have sprained your ankle; lean on me,' he entreated; and any bystanders must have heard how full of tenderness and anguish was his tone.

'It is nothing,' she answered; 'nothing indeed; only I knocked

my foot ; and I never could bear pain—never ;' and as she lifted her eyes for a moment he saw they were swimming with tears.

He was terribly concerned.

'Do not attempt to move at present,' he exclaimed. ' You are sure you have not sprained your ankle ? Can you stand ?'

She laughed outright, laughed and sobbed at the same moment, as she said,

'I am not used to have such a fuss made about me. If I had broken a bone you could not look more frightened.'

'I am thankful you have not,' he answered. 'I was frightened for the moment. Are you better now ? Should you not like to stand here a little longer ? No ? Are you quite sure ? Then take my arm ;' and so, slowly and almost in silence, they paced the Forest glades, he every now and then looking anxiously in her face ; she smiling back her assurances that the pain was almost all gone, that she was certain she had not hurt herself seriously.

They left the wood and proceeded along the high-road till they reached the lane which led down to Roding Farm. Here she withdrew her hand, and said,

'I am quite right now, thank you. Please not to come any further. He would want to know why you returned, and might be frightened.'

'Are you quite certain you can manage by yourself ?' he asked anxiously, holding the hand that had just before been laid on his arm. 'I do not like letting you go alone.'

She laughed a little once again.

'As I have told you,' she said, 'I am not used to being so much thought of ;' and she was going, when he stopped her.

'One moment, Mrs. Palthorpe. Do not, pray do not think of trying

what you spoke of a little while since. Leave all to me. I shall be sure to hear of something that may enable your husband to earn an income. I feel so sorry for him—and—you. It seems terrible for young people to have met with such misfortunes. You will trust me, won't you ?'

She looked at him, astonished both by his words and his earnestness.

'Of course I will,' she answered, seeing he was waiting for her reply. 'I have no one else. I don't know any one besides yourself who could help us—or who would,' she added *sotto voce*.

'Then that is settled,' he said ; and he stood and watched her till she was far down the lane, after which time he followed at a distance till he saw her turn into the trim garden in front of Roding Farm.

He did not leave the spot for some minutes after he heard the door shut behind her ; and when at length he turned on his way to Leytonstone, he did not retrace the Forest glades, but, rigidly keeping to high-roads and made footpaths, he strode past great houses and pretty villas, and reached the station, that lies almost under the shadow of a church-tower, just as a train from Loughton slackened speed and ran slowly along the metals, stopping with much noise of brakes and a pleasing deliberateness of movement.

Half an hour later he was in the Sunday stillness of Fenchurch-street, wending his way westward, and feeling like a man who, having essayed to fight an unequal battle, creeps worsted off the field.

## CHAPTER XI.

MRS. PALTHORPE'S DECISION.

THE world seems full of empty niches, but whenever one wants to put self or friend into even the humblest of them, that moment, as if by magic, each place is claimed as bespoken.

We all in a small way find this the case. No matter how humble our aspirations, no matter how small the post be we wish to secure for clerk or servant, for man or maid, so certainly we find all the avenues leading to fame or competence full of seething struggling humanity.

To look at the advertisements in the newspapers one might imagine no man need stand idle a day ; to try for a situation of any kind is to find talent, energy, honesty, youth, experience, at a discount. Buying, we are told, is one thing, and selling quite another, and practically each day proves the truth of this ; for if we want a butler or a manager, a groom or a secretary, how difficult it is to suit ourselves, to discover the precious article of which we are in search ! But if we desire to sell, we find the labour-market literally overflowing with human goods of precisely the same description as we are bringing into it, that the qualities we offer have lost all value, that they are considered so much inferior raw material which cannot be worked up into any useful or profitable purpose.

This was what Mr. Hay found, at all events. Standing under the moonlight, away from the noise and turmoil of London, it had seemed to him that it would be quite easy to fit Mr. Palthorpe into some desirable post—a secretaryship, for instance, where he need do little or nothing save talk pleasantly and read the newspaper ; but if he had wanted the manager-

ship of the Bank of England or some post in the Royal Household, either might apparently have been more easily compassed.

Each man he spoke to had his own especial *protégé* to provide for, or else the question of health came on the *tapis*. If neither of these causes indicated failure, then there came the ‘hope deferred’ business ; a ‘good’ thing would be open shortly, a new company was to be launched in January, and if Mr. Hay chose to interest himself in that, why, doubtless some berth could be found for his friend ; an opportunity might offer shortly in connection with the Midlandshire Mining Company, and so on, till Mr. Hay decided it was of no use trying to obtain any appointment through his friends. ‘I must buy him something,’ he considered ruefully enough, for by this time he had begun to count the money that walk in the morning twilight, that bunch of grapes, was likely to amount to ; and then the question came, what should he buy ? what useful toy was it most likely the sick man could be induced to accept and turn to advantage ?

Here, by the way, two great mistakes may be pointed out, and the attention of those who believe they are honestly willing to give is especially invited to it.

Supposing that a man wants help who can help himself, and who is more than anxious to help himself, rich folks are too apt to say, ‘O, he will do better without us ; he is quite able to breast the hill,’ and so leave the person who only requires a touch of the hand, a very trifling assistance up the hill, to strain and strive and wellnigh kill himself in the struggle to mount it. On the other part, take the man who is absolutely helpless, who requires money and strength and friendship to mount

the steep, how do we find wealthy friends treat him? As a rule, just thus: they give him a lift, say, for a hundred yards or so, buoy up his expectations, raise his hopes, and then remarking, 'It is of no use trying to achieve impossibilities,' leave him stranded by the roadside in somewhat worse plight than the good nineteenth-century Samaritans found him.

But this was not Mr. Hay's way, and hence his perplexity. He had taken up the matter, and he meant to carry it through. Only he did not know how, which involved a trouble certainly. He would have set him up in a shop, or started him in business, or helped him to the good-will of a lodging-house, or got him some desirable agency. The trouble was, he did not know the precise line in which Mr. Palthorpe's genius lay. He could not in the slightest degree guess either his weak or his strong points; and he did not desire to so far increase their acquaintance with each other as to be able from actual knowledge to say, 'This will suit him,' 'That will not.'

At last suddenly the thought occurred to him, 'He might like a farm'; and satisfied that such an arrangement would in all probability best solve the difficulty, he started off one morning just before Christmas to sound Mr. Palthorpe on the subject. Since the Sunday when he and Mrs. Palthorpe walked through Epping he had never visited Wanstead. On that Sunday night he came to a resolution, and he meant to stick to it. He would not run his head into the lion's mouth of temptation and ruin. A wild beast's den, he felt, might sometimes be a safer abode for a man than the companionship of a fair woman, let his training have been what it would, and let her have been born as much below

him as she might. He was not a boy, he was not an imbecile, and he knew now what it all meant; for alas, he found he was human, and he could never forget she was fair.

Nevertheless, he had not given up Mr. Palthorpe, and he did not mean to do so till that gentleman was in a state of body and position of mind to climb the world's steep hill alone. Here lay the trouble. If the man had been purely selfish he might have fled and found safety; but he was drawn back again into the meshes of temptation, not merely by his weakness and worst impulses, but also by the best attributes of his nature.

To define such a struggle as went on within him is difficult; to sketch-in the details, to show all the lights and shades, the sunny bits in the mental landscape, the gloom of the deeper shadows, well-nigh impossible.

In a warfare of this sort a man is never thoroughly conscious of all he has passed through himself. Such battles cannot even in imagination be fought twice. It is like mortal illness: when a patient recovers he rarely remembers the details of his physical trial. The days and the nights have come and gone, filled with such alternations of pain and weakness as have dulled the sense of time. That is all he can tell of the progress of a malady, the effects of which, perhaps, abide with him to the end; and it was thus with the man whose moral struggle I have so feebly and faintly described. He did not know, he never knew, how often he had wrestled with his foe, how he had thrust temptation behind him, how he had struggled against his inclinations, and resolved—vainly—nothing should lead him into sin.

On that point, at least, he felt perfectly satisfied. He meant no

wrong, he would do no wrong. He intended no disloyalty to Mr. Palthorpe; all he wanted, now he understood the workings of his own heart, was to benefit the husband and the wife, place them in a position where they would have a chance of escaping from the thraldom of poverty, and never see either of them again.

Quite honestly he made this resolve; but it would have required a stronger nature than his to keep to it in the face of the circumstances that ensued.

As he went along Fenchurch-street he was stopped by Doctor Dilton.

'I am so glad to meet you,' said the doctor. 'I have been wishing to see you for some time.'

'Is it—about—Mr. Palthorpe?' asked Mr. Hay, startled and surprised; for in his preoccupation he had passed the doctor unnoticed, and the suddenness of the address alarmed him.

'Yes; about Mr. Palthorpe.'

'He is—not—dead—is he?' asked the other.

'No, he is not; he is improving; he is a great deal better, indeed; but still I wanted to speak to you about him.'

As they stood, several people nodded to Mr. Hay or said 'good-day,' or made some other slight remark in passing, many of them addressing him by what the doctor supposed to be his Christian name.

Under these amenities Mr. Hay waxed impatient.

'Let us get out of this row,' he suggested; and the doctor having no objection, they turned down Rood-lane and crossed Great Tower-street, and so came out into a quiet corner near St. Dunstan's-in-the-East.

'I have not been able properly to attend to a word of what you have been saying,' Mr. Hay began, looking up at the spire of the

'lantern' church, as though he were addressing it instead of his companion. 'You were telling me something about your patient.'

'I was asking if you had influence with any house likely to give him a berth in the Colonies.'

'In the Colonies!' repeated Mr. Hay; 'does he want to leave England?' O, if he did, if he only did, what a relief, what a blessing, what a comfort it would be! For a moment Mr. Hay's heart swelled with thankfulness; then it seemed to sink, depressed by an overwhelming despair.

'I do not know,' answered the doctor; 'I have said nothing to him yet, because I hoped to see you, and ascertain whether you considered my idea at all capable of being carried out.'

'But why do you wish him to go?' inquired the other.

'Because he will never get thoroughly well here. He won't keep quiet. If his body is still, his mind is at work. It would not be natural for a man of his age to endure idleness. He wants to get out and begin to earn money. He is grateful for the gifts which have been sent him, and yet he chafes at taking them. I can see all that plainly. Her—Mrs. Palthorpe's—grandfather has offered them a temporary asylum there; but though he makes no objection, I am sure the very idea is gall and wormwood to him. Now I like my patient, and I am proud of the cure I have effected so far; and for these reasons I do not wish him to become an invalid for life.'

'I hope there is no likelihood of that.'

'There is every likelihood of it,' answered the doctor, 'if he attempts to exert himself too soon or too much. He will never again be fit to undertake the duties of an ordinary clerk. Constant desk-

work would kill him. My notion was that if you knew any one having a house abroad where a reliable man was wanted, or where room could be made for a reliable man, you would be doing a kind and Christian action in mentioning the circumstances of this case. A long sea-voyage would be the making of him—a voyage with a certainty of work at the end of it.'

'I think I understand,' said Mr. Hay as the doctor paused.

'You see, on board ship he must keep quiet. He would have the best of air, food, and some companionship; and—and—altogether, it would be the making of him,' repeated the doctor. 'Do you think you could give a helping hand to what we want?'

'I think I could. I will try, at any rate,' was the answer.

'Thank you greatly. May I ask you one thing more—don't think me troublesome—when could you begin to try?'

'To-day, this hour,' was the eager answer. 'I will set about the matter at once.'

He stretched out his hand and would have hurried away immediately; but the doctor detained him.

'I am afraid you are not quite well, Mr. Hay; you are looking much thinner than when I saw you first.'

'A mind ill at ease,' thought Mr. Hay; but he only answered, that he had nothing the matter with him, felt as well as he ever did in the whole course of his life.

'Were I you, I should take a little rest or change, or both,' persisted the doctor. 'You seem somewhat nervous.'

'Wear and tear of business,' explained the other. 'I have a good deal on my shoulders.'

'Making haste to be rich,' said Doctor Dilton. 'Well, each man

to his taste. I could not endure the turmoil you City men live in; but then I am quite a country bird. By the bye, we shall be leaving Stratford in the spring.'

'Indeed! Where are you going?'

'To the borders of Wales. I have heard of a quiet little practice there that will suit me, I think, and the children will grow up stronger and better in the country; besides, Mrs. Dilton does not like London.'

'I hope you will be very happy in your new home,' said Mr. Hay civilly.

'I fancy we shall; we have been very happy hitherto. Now,' he added, 'be warned, and don't go on taking so much out of yourself. What use is all the money in the world without health?'

'It is so much better, at any rate, than poverty without health, as light is better than darkness,' laughed Mr. Hay.

'Well, perhaps you have the best of it,' answered the doctor; and then they finally separated, the doctor to make his way along Great Tower-street and Eastcheap into the heart of the City; and Mr. Hay to dive into Lower Thames-street, for he had quite given up all idea of going to Wanstead that day.

At length it seemed as though he was in a fair way of getting Mr. Palthorpe such a berth as Doctor Dilton recommended. About that time clerks of every kind were at a premium in Australia. Every one was off to the diggings. The gold mania pervaded all ranks and all classes; sailors left their ships, shepherds their flocks, servants their situations, husbands their wives. The finest lottery ever imagined was opened in Australia, and tickets in it were to be obtained by any one willing to work. Ledgers remained shut, day-journals were

not written up, return crews were hard to obtain, and an *employé* certain to remain at his post was worth his weight in gold.

Under these circumstances it was not long ere Mr. Hay heard of a house who professed their willingness to open negotiations with Mr. Palthorpe. They wrote to him, and he answered; they applied to his references, and found everything he had stated literally correct; they made him an offer which sounded munificent; he jumped at it. He hoped he should get perfectly strong on the voyage, he said, and they would not find him ungrateful for all their kindness.

Doctor Dilton had an interview with the firm, and satisfied the partners that his patient would be fit for work many a day before he reached Australia.

'Could he sail in February, do you think?' asked the head of the house.

The doctor felt certain he could. The sooner he left England, the sooner he would begin really to improve.

'All he wants now,' added that worthy gentleman, 'is rest of body and ease of mind, and he will have both in your good vessel,' he added; and so the matter once mooted was quickly decided.

At the farm all was bustle and confusion; a pleasant excitement succeeded to the former dead level of monotonous days and anxious nights; letters arrived and letters were written; the outfit had to be provided and trunks procured. His new employers acted with great liberality towards him, and Mr. Palthorpe was not permitted to lack any necessary for want of funds.

'I rub my eyes and wonder if it is all real,' he said joyously to Mr. Hay. 'I think crossing the ocean will make a new man of me;

indeed, already I feel a different person.'

Mr. Hay went backwards and forwards to the farm a good deal in those last days. Of course he was quite safe now. There could not be the slightest danger to him; there had never been to her. Thousands of miles would soon stretch between him and this fairest of women, and then he—Ah, he would not think of that; would push the idea of the time when it could be no longer optional with him whether or not he went to see her far behind.

Sufficient for the day! Well, the days went by all too swiftly, and it was the last before the Palthorpes were to leave London. They meant to go on board at Plymouth, stopping a night at Mr. Agges' house on their way down.

Everything was settled; the heavy luggage was in the vessel, the lighter packed, corded, addressed. Down in Hampshire the old grandfather and the stern middle-aged aunt were talking about their expected guests. At Roding Farm every one felt glad Mrs. Palthorpe would so soon be gone, and sorry at the thought of parting with her husband. Doctor Dilton had paid his last visit, and cordially wished his patient 'God-speed.'

'You will write to me, won't you?' he said; and gave the intending emigrant that new address on the borders of Wales to which he had referred in his conversation with Mr. Hay.

'I will be sure to write, and I will never, never forget your kindness, doctor.'

'Kindness? pooh!' answered Doctor Dilton. 'It was my business to get you well, and I have done it.'

Then he spoke a few kindly and hopeful words to Mrs. Palthorpe, but she replied to them with short curt sentences and averted eyes.

She was in one of her worst moods. She bade Doctor Dilton good-bye with the scantiest civility, and when he said he trusted she would like Australia, answered, with a scoffing laugh that had no merriment in it, she had no doubt she should when she got there.

After his departure she left the room, and, putting on her bonnet and shawl, was in the act of crossing the hall, when her husband met her.

'Going out, Mira?' he said, and his face flushed a little and his voice trembled.

'Yes, I am tired of being indoors. That doctor too has given me a headache; I thought he never would take his departure.'

'It is the last day,' he suggested pleadingly.

With a flounce and impatient exclamation she turned her back upon his entreating gaze.

'I thought we had done with all that,' she said, and went out of the front door, banging it after her.

Mr. Palthorpe took down his hat, and for a moment stood irresolute; then sighing wearily he hung his hat up again, and, walking into the sitting-room where he had spent so many weary, weary hours, stood for a long time looking out of the window over the fields and the trees and the pleasant homely surroundings that were soon to become a mere memory of the past.

'Is it my fault?' he thought. 'I know I must have been a heavy burden, but yet—'

She went down into the Forest; she sought one of the grassy glades along which she had once followed Mr. Hay. She was not thinking of him, or of any one save herself, as she paced restlessly up and down on her solitary path. It had been a mild winter, damp and warm, and already there were

primroses in the sheltered nooks, and everywhere the cushions of moss looked green and beautiful.

The afternoon had come, but the air did not strike cold, though the sun had gone for the day, and Mrs. Palthorpe, walking up and down, had a lovely colour in her cheeks, and looked more beautiful in her anger than most women do in their smiles.

She wore a becoming though somewhat shabby bonnet and a bright shawl, and altogether made a pretty bit of colour in the landscape as she moved to and fro amongst the trees; now choosing one glade, again deserting it for another; sometimes pausing, as though debating some question with herself at leisure; and then hurrying on, as though a restless demon were urging her forward.

She might have spent about an hour in this fashion, in a solitude only broken by the incursions of a few schoolchildren, or a herd looking after stray cattle, when, entering one of the long avenues, she beheld a figure she recognised.

'It is Mr. Hay,' she said, pausing; then hurried swiftly forward. 'Who would have thought of meeting you here!' she exclaimed, still with the vivid pink in her cheeks and mellow light in her eyes.

'I often come this way,' he answered composedly, for he too had seen her afar off, and was quite prepared for the meeting. 'I was going to the farm to say good-bye.'

'Thank you,' she answered carelessly; 'you will find Mr. Palthorpe at home—at least I left him there about an hour ago.'

Mr. Hay did not immediately avail himself of this information.

'Taking a last look at English scenery, Mrs. Palthorpe?' he suggested, glancing expressively around.

'I! O dear, no. I am not going to leave England.'

'Not going to leave England!' He repeated the words after her, but seemed like one who failed to grasp their meaning. 'Why, what is the reason of this change? What has happened?'

'This has happened,' she said, interrupting him, and with the fire which had been lying smouldering in her eyes now blazing from them, 'that at last I and my husband understand each other. He is tired of his bargain, and I am sick to death of mine. I never meant to go to Australia. As I told him to-day, he must have been out of his senses to think I should go at present, at all events. Does he think, I wonder, I have not had enough of poverty here, without running the risk of being stranded with him away in that uncivilised country? Does he think he is the only one of us who repents his marriage? I have repented it, I can tell him. If I had known the misery I was bringing upon myself, I would have seen all the Palthorpes at the bottom of the sea before I would have had anything to do with one of them; and as she finished this outburst Mrs. Palthorpe covered her face and sobbed aloud.

Utterly shocked and confounded, Mr. Hay stood silent. He did not know what to do, and he could not think of any word to say. It would not be going too far to declare he felt frightened.

When she told him she was going to remain in England, he felt stunned; and when she went on to indicate the motive of the quarrel which had taken place, he could only remain mute.

Again he felt as though he were dreaming that he stood with this woman under the arching trees. It was a bad dream and a dangerous one, from which he

must try to awaken without a moment's delay.

'And Mr. Palthorpe,' he managed to exclaim at last, 'is he not going?'

'Of course he is going,' she said. 'He can't stop at home and starve.'

'And, forgive me if I seem officious, do you not think in his state of health, to say nothing of other matters, it is your duty to go with him?'

'No, I do not,' she returned; 'and if you knew everything, you would not either; you would say it was my duty to stop at home.'

'But do you consider he is fit to go alone? Remember what a frightful illness he has had.'

'Do you suppose I am likely to forget it?' she answered; 'do you imagine I had nothing to bear either? And as for his going alone,' she proceeded vehemently, 'he will do far better without me. He makes friends fast enough, you need not be uneasy about that. But I am keeping you, Mr. Hay,' and she made a movement as though to continue her walk in the direction opposite to that from which Roding Farm lay.

'Shall you soon be returning home?' he asked, hesitating about leaving her.

'No, not at present; but don't let me keep you.'

If she expected him to stop she was disappointed.

'Then I will say good-bye now, Mrs. Palthorpe,' he answered; and, holding out his hand, looked wistfully in her tear-stained face.

'I suppose I can't put this matter right,' he said tentatively.

'Not unless you could unmarry us,' she replied bitterly, and turned away, still making as he watched that bright bit of colour in the sombre woods.

Mr. Hay went on to the farm. He did not mention Mrs. Pal-

thorpe to her husband, nor did Mr. Palthorpe make any mention of his wife, save to say he regretted she was not within.

'And I really do not know what time she will be back,' he added; a hint for the visitor perhaps, and one on which he was not slow to act.

'You have done more for me than I can ever repay,' said Mr. Palthorpe, as he stood taking leave of his benefactor. 'May I write and tell you how I get on in Australia?'

'O, you will have plenty to do without writing to me,' answered Mr. Hay; 'I shall hear of you through Doctor Dilton. Good-bye. I hope and believe you will succeed out there.'

'I hope I shall,' answered Mr. Palthorpe, 'better than I have done here. Good-bye, Mr. Hay, and God bless you. Some day perhaps I shall be able to tell you how I have felt your kindness.'

'Do not speak of that, please,' entreated the other; and then it was over, hurried at the last as all partings are. And while the daylight still lingered, Mr. Hay left Roding Park and took the road which led straight to the nearest station, eschewing the Forest and all that delightful sylvan scenery, of which Doctor Dilton made such honourable mention on the morning when, walking due west, he had been so suddenly addressed by the woman who was to spoil his life.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LETTER.

SOUTH of the Thames, in that part of London now known as a portion of the S.W. district, there were to be found for some years after the Great Exhibition many

pretty little houses in neighbourhoods that, although within easy walking distance of the City, seemed quite rural.

Many of these houses still remain, but their surroundings are rural no longer. One runs up against them in unlikely localities. There are some to be met with at the back of the Clapham and Brixton Roads, on the way to Wandsworth, round and about Camberwell and Walworth. Nay, I could name one street close to Upper Kennington-lane, where the passer-by, looking through the windows of the front parlours and the French windows of the back parlours, can catch a glimpse of green leaves and winding walks and well-grown shrubs in the gardens at the rear.

The London of that date bore all the traces of having been built less according to any orthodox plan than by individual fancy; and the same diverse personal characteristics which distinguished most of the thoroughfares before railways came and changed the appearance of all things stamped the suburbs, though perhaps with a fainter impression.

Now one man builds for many. 'Estates' are laid out for the habitation of future tenants as a workhouse or an asylum is prepared for the reception of its inmates. In these days the 'residence' no more indicates the preferences of the person who lives in it than a particular style of dress does the rank of the wearer.

Queen Anne houses are furnished with all sorts of incongruous articles, and often as not there is an utter absence of simplicity in the interior of a cottage.

It was different once. There used to be a certain correspondence between the exterior of a house and the proclivities of its owner.

Taste trained roses round the

windows, planted the wisteria, tended the jasmine till it grew over the gable of the little house. The gardener does all that now; he contracts for the creepers and the scarlet geraniums and the golden feather, which is only our old friend camomile under another name, just as the builder contracts] to run up so many (un)desirable residences at so much apiece. He or his fellow takes you and your neighbour, and the neighbour next to him, and 'gardens' you each, as it is called, at so much a head. Town houses and town gardens are as much alike as two railway trains. The initiated can of course detect such small differences as nurses profess to do in twins, but to the ordinary observer the effect is a distressing monotony.

It was not so formerly—ere Norwood became a part of London, while Streatham still remained a village, when the way to Wandsworth was a pleasant country road, when the Surrey Gardens were not built over, and when Vauxhall with its fire-works, its lamps, and its fortuneteller had disappeared no longer than the great glass house in Hyde Park.

In a detached villa, then, in what is now the south-west part of London south of the Thames, there resided, some few years after Mr. Palthorpe's departure from England, a certain Mrs. Hay. It was a very pretty house—pretty, small, unpretentious, well set back from the somewhat narrow road in which it was situated, and screened from observation by a thick laurel hedge planted inside an iron railing, and also by handsome and numerous shrubs as well as by some fine old trees.

A nice little residence, somewhat dark perhaps as regarded the front windows; but charming at the back, with its garden well

enclosed, with its smooth grass-plot and many-hued flowers, its old-fashioned sun-dial (quite hidden away under the shade of the mulberry-tree), its ridiculous fountain, trickling, however, pleasantly into the stone basin, and making a cool murmuring music of its own in the warm summer weather.

On the afternoon, however, when the reader is asked to enter the gate and go up the broad path, and walk through the front door and cross the hall, it was not summer weather either at The Aspens, as the place was called, or anywhere else in England.

It was a dreary day in January; a biting wind raced down the roads and along the streets, and lay in wait at corners to pounce out upon unsuspecting passers-by. About the poorer neighbourhoods thinly-clad women went shivering over the pavements; infants in arms were crying with the cold; carmen ran beside their horses, trying to warm themselves while exciting the tired brutes to speed by the mere force of emulation. It was a dreary wretched afternoon without, one which made a snug house, a cosy room, and a bright fire seem all the more desirable by contrast.

But the lady who sat beside the fire in the drawing-room at The Aspens seemed to have no thought to bestow upon internal comfort or external misery. She sat close to the hearth, leaning a little forward in her chair, her head supported by her hands, staring straight into the blaze.

She never moved her position or stirred a finger even when the opening of the door must have told her some one had entered the room. She did not turn round or greet the new-comer, a man, by even a single word. He came quite close to her and laid his hand on her head, and still she did not speak.

'What is the matter? Are not you well, Mira?' he asked.

He bent down to catch her answer, but none came.

'Has anything happened? Are you ill?' he again asked, repeating the sense of his former sentence, while varying its sound.

She remained resolutely silent.

He could hear the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece, but he could not hear that she made any reply.

He drew her head a little round towards the light, and looked at her. For one swift instant she lifted her eyes to his, and then slowly let them droop till the long black lashes hid them quite; then, as his hold upon her relaxed, she turned slowly once again towards the fire, and resumed her contemplation of the blazing coals.

Evidently he had but just come in, and could form no idea as to what it was ailed her. Clearly also these fits of gloom or temper or regret were not uncommon, for he seemed more perplexed than alarmed by her unaccountable preoccupation.

He walked towards the glass door which opened on the lawn, looked out into the cheerless twilight, came back with deliberation, and took up his position at the side of the mantelpiece opposite to that where she was sitting.

As he stands there with the firelight flickering upon his face—calm, erect, self-contained—you recognise him at once—him and her; you know it is the same man who walked westward some years previously very early upon a summer's morning; you remember that she it was who, from beneath the dark Portuguese laurel, spoke to and stopped him as he walked towards Stratford. Though it is winter now, and the scene altogether different, the scent of the flowers, heavy with night dews,

seems to float upon the air—gilly-flowers and carnations, roses and jasmine, the subtle odour of mignonette—all mingling with the sweet breath of the coming dawn; while, surrounded with mystery and bathed in an atmosphere impregnated with perfume, she stood in the stillness and majesty of the departing night, beckoning him to her, beckoning him to ruin!

He remained silent for a few moments, looking down upon the fair picture upon which the fire-light flickered. She was not a woman who posed for effect. As has been said in an earlier chapter, Nature had not bestowed upon, neither had art taught her, those wiles and graces with which others of her sex heighten their charms or make up for lack of them; but unconsciously the attitude she now adopted suited well her face and figure, the remarkable beauty of the one, the supple limlessness of the latter. She was well dressed too—the folds of a rich silk fell over the white hearthrug; she wore bracelets on her wrists, and precious stones glittered amongst the rings on her fingers. Lace, soft and creamy, made the soft fairness of her throat more attractive still; and a golden arrow was thrust with apparent carelessness through the coil of hair she arranged gathered into a great knot at the back of her shapely head.

A lovely woman truly—a sinner, but not a Magdalene. Any one with less idea of repentance never existed. She might regret the absence of a favourite dish at dinner, but remorse seemed to be a feeling she could not understand. Clearly, therefore, it was no sudden access of despair for wrong done—wrong which could never be righted—that was producing the symptoms the man who looked



'He remained absolutely silent.'

See 'The Mystery in Palace Gardens,' p. 304.

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down upon her failed to understand.

He thought he was acquainted with all her moods and tenses, but as he gazed he acknowledged himself mistaken. Never before, never, had he seen her sitting as she then sat, staring with that fixed hopeless expression into the fire, with her eyes full of unshed tears, and her fingers crushing all colour out of her delicate cheeks.

He drew a chair close to her, and sat down. He took her hands gently in both of his, and laid her head against his shoulder.

'Mira, tell me what it is,' he entreated. 'Have I done anything? have I vexed you?'

'No,' she said, with a gasping sob. 'No; O no!'

The years had changed and refined her voice. A life of ease and comparative luxury had rubbed little by little the external commonness off her speech and manner. Underneath them lay still doubtless the same nature, but its evidences were softened or obliterated. It was the same woman, and yet a different, as she who had paced the grassy glades of Epping, and roused at times in Doctor Dilton's honest breast a feeling of hatred to which he would have been ashamed fully to confess.

'What has happened, then?' he persisted. 'What is the matter?'

She raised her head and answered:

'He is coming home.'

'What?'

Their hands dropped asunder, and they drew back—he from her, she from him—as though a sword had parted them; and yet it was but the one word he spoke; the one word so eloquent in its anguish, its horror, its despair.

If the man himself had appeared before them it had almost seemed less terrible. Then there would have been something tan-

gible to grapple with; but now there arose a host of uncertainties, a thousand nameless terrors, the multitude of self-summoned accusers which dog the footsteps of the wicked when no living soul pursueth.

'When?' he asked after a pause, as though some long explanatory sentence had been spoken in answer to his exclamation.

'Immediately; he must be on his way ere this.'

Mr. Hay arose and paced the room. Up and down, up and down, blindly he threaded his way through the maze of furniture; he was not conscious of what he did; he wanted to realise that which was about to happen.

Aftersome time, for the twilight had gone and the evening was darkening down, he came back to his old position by the mantelpiece, and said gloomily,

'I must think what will have to be done.'

'I will never live with him again!' she broke in hastily. 'Nothing could induce me to do that.'

'Do you think he would want you?' asked her companion, with that awful plain-spokenness, that fearful candour, which at such a crisis does duty for a sneer.

'Of course I do, or he would not be coming back,' she answered, taking the question as literally as it was put, though not in the slightest degree in the sense it was intended.

'Ay, but he does not know,' said the other moodily.

'And he never need know,' she quickly retorted.

'He must know,' was the answer.

'Who is to tell him?'

'I will.'

He spoke the words perfectly calmly; but the blaze, leaping up at the moment, revealed his face, and showed with what an effort he uttered them.

She cowed a little; for once, for one brief moment, she forgot herself.

'He would kill you,' she said huskily.

'Let him; it is his right,' he replied.

Then ensued another silence; it was she who broke it.

'Could not we go away anywhere?' she asked timidly.

'No,' he said.

'Why not?'

'Because I do not choose it. That which I have done is done, and I must abide by the consequences—we must, rather;' and he shuddered as he spoke.

She rose and came to where he stood. She laid her hand on his arm, and though her touch made him tremble he would not shake it off.

'John'—she had never before spoken to him as she was speaking now—'you won't cast me off, you will not let him or any one take me away, will you?'

He looked out into the darkness for a moment, away from the firelight and the glow and the soft luxury, with a wild feeling of regret. O, for the might have been! for the sinless days of old! for that time to return which could come not back again, when choice was possible and a way of retreat open! for the conscience void of offence! for the thoughts and the hopes which might be his never more, never, never more! Then the spasm was over, the agony of memory quelled, and he answered, without tenderness, but without reproach,

'I have promised, Mira. You may depend I shall keep my word.'

'Let us go away,' she whispered.

'We cannot,' he returned. 'Besides, it would be but deferring the evil day. Let it come! I for one have been anticipating it long enough.'

'He will kill me,' she said, in an ecstasy of terror.

'You need not see him.'

'He will insist on seeing me.'

'I don't think you need fear that,' he answered; but she did not notice the cutting merciless remark.

'He will, I know he will,' she persisted, going back to her seat and resuming her former attitude of utter hopeless abandonment. 'If you won't go away, I shall. I dare not face him. John, do you hear me? I dare not do it.'

'I hear you,' he answered from the other end of the room; for once again he was pacing its length. 'Make your mind quite easy; you shall not face him; then, struck by a sudden thought, he asked, 'How did you hear this? When did you know it?'

'To-day; he wrote to me.'

'To you? Wrote to you?'

'Yes, to me; he says he intends to leave almost immediately,' she added, with a little uneasy hurry in her tone.

'Give me the letter, I want to see it,' said Mr. Hay, coming close up to her.

'I have not got it here.'

'Go and fetch it, then, please; his tone was more like a command than a request.'

'What do you want to see it for?'

'I wish to see it; that is sufficient.'

'It is my letter, and I do not think you ought to ask me to show it to you.'

'It is my letter as much as yours, and I insist upon your showing it to me,' he retorted.

'I shall not do anything of the kind,' she said; and again she rested her face upon her hands and looked into the fire, but this time with the sullen stubborn expression he had learned to know so well.

There was a pause; during its continuance both were, after their

respective fashions, considering the position and gathering their forces.

At length he spoke :

'Mira, pray go and get that letter.'

She did not answer.

'Or tell me where I can find it, and I will get it for myself.'

If she had been possessed by a dumb spirit, she could not have taken less notice of his remark.

He hesitated for a short time; then he stepped across to where she sat, and said, with exceeding gentleness,

'Mira dear, don't be childish; we cannot disassociate our interests now. Fetch me that letter, I entreat of you—will you?' and he laid his hand imploringly on hers.

She threw it off angrily.

'I will not,' she declared; 'I would not if you went down on your knees and begged for a sight of it.'

'O, very well,' he said; and without uttering another word he took up his hat, which he had laid on a table near the fireplace, and walked towards the door.

This time he neither paused nor hesitated, neither did he look back. She turned her head and watched him curiously. No doubt she expected him to return; but he did not waver or, what would have been equivalent, speak.

He opened the door, he was in the hall; he would have left the house in another minute, when she started up, and cried,

'John.'

He did not come back; he stood still, and asked,

'What do you want?'

'To speak to you.'

'What have you got to say?' he asked.

'Come here, and I will tell you.'

He stepped back within the doorway, and, closing the door as

a matter of precaution, repeated his question.

'Come here,' she insisted.

'I will come,' he declared, advancing towards her with evident reluctance; 'but for your own sake I hope you are not trifling with me.'

She stood with her long dress trailing behind her, and her ornaments—ah, where was the goldsmith, cunning though he might be in his craft, who could tell the price that had been paid for those baubles—glittering in the dancing firelight, with her beautiful face looking upon him bitterly and scornfully, and her hands nervously tearing at the fastenings of her dress.

'You insist on seeing that letter?' she asked, in a low distinct voice the listener felt placed a restraint on every word.

'I wish to see it, certainly,' he answered.

'Take it, then,' she retorted; and drawing a paper from her bosom, tore it across, and then flung the pieces at his feet.

He did not make a remark; he stooped and picked up the fragments; then he stirred the fire into a blaze, and, pulling a low chair close to the hearth, read the letter through slowly and deliberately twice.

When he had finished, quite finished, he placed the letter in his pocket-book, and then said,

'I thought you told me you parted on bad terms.'

'So we did.'

'And that he never wrote to you nor took the slightest notice of your existence beyond sending that money which is accumulating in the bank.'

'Neither he did.'

'And that he never expressed the slightest desire for you to join him in Australia, or sent one single message which you could

construe into regret for your separation.'

'Neither he did.'

'And yet in this letter, which, indeed,' and his voice wavered as he spoke, 'is as touching a letter as I ever read in all my life, he speaks of others which have preceded it, of the coldness and brevity of your replies, of his own unabated affection, of his grief that the poverty into which he dragged you, and the trouble he caused at the time of his accident, should have changed the love he believed you once bore him into something almost dislike; and then he goes on to hope—O Mira, how can I repeat his words!'

'There is no necessity for you to try, surely,' she remarked as he stopped.

'That the day is not far distant when you will be able to tell him you are pleased to see him back in England; when you will be glad to pack up and return with him to a country where he can now manage to give you a beautiful home and provide you, though not with luxuries, with every comfort.'

'That is what he says,' she agreed defiantly.

'Then you have been deceiving me all the time,' summed up Mr. Hay; 'you have deliberately been telling me what was not the truth.'

'You have always been so truthful yourself,' she retorted; 'it is, of course, quite right you should reproach me.'

'I do not know what you mean or what you are trying to imply,' he said; 'but in any case it is no answer to my statement. Your husband never cast you off; never ceased writing to you; never entertained the idea of remaining in Australia without his wife. It was all false, Mira; all untrue from beginning to end.'

Nothing could well be more

sad, more hopeless, than his tone. Even she felt that, for she remarked,

'I said you had better not read the letter; but you would take your own way. I would have kept it from your sight if you had let me.'

He did not answer her. What need was there of speech between them? As she had sat looking intently at the fire, so he now remained with his eyes fixed on the glowing coals, and his thoughts wandering over the irrevocable past, and shadowing faintly out the uncertain future.

Before him there arose, as in a vision, a frank handsome face; handsome, though worn with illness, wasted by pain. A pair of honest blue eyes were raised to his thankfully; a faint voice spoke of gratitude; and now—and now—

He had never thought of wrong; and yet this was the end, or rather, for him, the beginning of the end. The man had trusted him; the idea of not trusting had not entered into his mind. What a home-coming! what a tale to greet one who had been striving and struggling in a distant land!

Had tears of blood availed, he would have shed them. O terrible awakening from the slothful sleep of sin! O woful dawn after the dark night of wrong! Dead Sea fruit! He had held it in his hand, all fair without, all foul within; sweet to the lips, sour to the teeth, pleasant to the sense, death to the soul!

If the man he wronged had seen him then he must have been avenged. Gloomier than the gathering night were the thoughts and memories crowding through his mind; keener than the cutting wind the pang which shot through his heart as he read the words of that letter, which could never be forgotten; louder than

the roaring blasts, which at times beat against the windows, the up-braiding of his conscience ; more dreary than the winter darkness the prospect his future presented.

He sat silent, looking into the fire; and she sat silent also, watching him furtively.

For her, and such as her, there is no remorse, and no repentance. She dreaded, but she did not regret ; she feared, but she would not have retraced a single step of the road she had travelled.

Here lay the difference between them. The difference there is between the sirens who sing on the rocks, and the men who, plunging in to reach them, are engulfed in depths, over the darkness of which there lies a glamour of moonlight, that can never penetrate the darkness where they lie dishonoured and dead.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### HE IS DEAD.

FINE spring weather ; green leaves and white blossoms everywhere, in the London suburbs as in the far-away country ; a pleasant scent of rural odours pervading even the City thoroughfares, as itinerant vendors pushed their trucks laden with sweet-smelling flowers over streets still wet after refreshing showers from vanished water-carts.

Lilacs and laburnums in full bloom, hawthorn perfuming all the land, fruit-trees snowy with blossom ; Nature as fair as she could look, Nature as busy as she could be.

Warm weather for the time of year, bright sunshine chilled by no east wind. The breezes that spring came from the west ; it was a pleasant May alike for invalids and the robust on shore, and it

seemed propitious also for those returning to England by sea. No stormy nights, no tempestuous days ; the Atlantic like a mill-pond, so sailors just off the ocean declared in figurative language ; the Channel as smooth and clear as glass.

A joyous season for any one to come home, if he were likely to find anything joyful awaiting him on the threshold. English birds singing in the woods, English meadows green and fair stretching beside dreamy rivers, red-tiled barns, comfortable farmhouses, picturesque cottages, sleepy villages, old churches surrounded by moss-covered tombstones, all dotting the quiet landscape. A beautiful country, the memory of which has haunted many a wanderer sleeping and waking, and brought him over thousands of miles to look upon its face once more.

Mr. Palthorpe had not yet arrived, but the person who was called Mrs. Hay knew when she might expect him. She had been told the name of the vessel by which he meant to sail and the probable date when it would reach England ; so that whatever delights the lovely spring-time brought to others, to her it only proved a weary watch, a long dread.

If she could have run away, The Aspens had beheld her no more ; but she knew nowhere to run to. She was not the woman to cast herself desolate and penniless upon the world, to leave a warm fireside and a comfortable home, and go out into the biting cold to face an uncertain future.

But she was afraid—horribly. She awoke at night in an agony of dread. In the very slightest degree she did not understand the nature of the man she had married and wronged, and she feared his

vengeance as she had never feared anything before in her life.

She grew thin and worn ; her face lost its former expression of calm indifference, and acquired one entirely fresh—that of sharpanxiety. She could not rest, she could settle to nothing. She could not bear to leave the house, and yet she did not like to remain in it. She suffered as only an intensely selfish woman entirely absorbed in the contemplation of her own danger could suffer, and her agony was all the keener because she dared not give expression to it. Even to her own soul she scarcely ventured to whisper,

' If both cast me off, what is to become of me ?'

For she feared poverty more than sin. She loved ease and comfort, to lie soft, to eat well, to be clothed in rich raiment, better than virtue. Sin, virtue ; they were words that had no meaning to her.

Conventionally she was aware certain ideas were attached to them ; but that those ideas should really influence the conduct of any human being seemed to her ridiculous.

There was, however, nothing ridiculous to her in the idea that she might have to leave The Aspens, and be compelled to return to an even worse poverty than that endured due east.

For as she had no gratitude, she had no faith in man's justice, or generosity, or remorse. She could not understand any one of these qualities—gratitude, faith, justice, generosity, remorse. She was as free from all such sentiments as though she had been made of marble instead of flesh and blood.

How the man, tender of conscience, soft of heart, strong of purpose, weak in temptation, a merciless judge where himself

was concerned, too ready with excuses for the short-comings of his fellows, bore the days and the weeks and the months of that long ordeal, I could never hope to tell.

There are things no writer ever can tell, as for instance the passage of the hours between sentence and execution, between arrest and trial, between crime and arrest.

What he passed through whilst awaiting the arrival of that homeward-bound vessel left its mark for life on his outward man, and branded words known only to himself upon his inmost soul.

In that fair spring time he aged years—mentally, morally, physically. When the summer came, it was not the same man who stood in the sunshine as had looked at the snow. Sin deals very heavily with some people. Like smallpox, it is partial in its ravages ; it pits and sears and marks most souls, but it passes lightly over others. He took the disease badly, and it struck deep into his very vitals. Never, truly it may be said, were the wounds it inflicted closed, the scars it left quite healed. He was very quiet, and very patient, and very repentant ; but he never drank of any water of Lethe ; he found no antidote powerful enough to undo the effect of the poison he wittingly swallowed, and which destroyed the peace and the happiness and the hope and the comfort of every hour of the future, that might have been so bright.

It was drawing very near : the days went by, the days full of actual sunshine, filled with beauty and perfume. It was time the vessel arrived ; any hour, any minute he might return. Nay, even then the good ship might be in harbour, the injured husband hastening to meet the wife he might never greet more !

Mr. Hay sat in his office in the City, looking at the shipping intelligence ; there was none that affected him. Well, the evil could only be considered as deferred.

He laid aside the *Times* and opened his letters ; there was nothing in the letters which interested him. Alas, there was nothing in those days which could really interest him, save the return of the man he had wronged.

He pushed his letters away, and sat with hands folded on his desk, and head turned towards the window, lost in thought. Sunshine streaming into the room where he sat, moths dancing in the sunbeams. A stillness more complete than ever reigned in wood or meadow ; for his office was situated at the back of his place of business, and gave only on an old City graveyard hemmed in by warehouses. Not a sound breaking the silence, not a person to intrude upon his reverie. For any stir or bustle of life, he might have been in his grave instead of in the heart of the City.

After a time the quiet seemed to affect him, for he started and drew the letters nearer to his hand, and was about to touch the bell, when his eye fell on a paragraph in the discarded *Times*, headed 'Loss of the North Wales.'

Something to interest him in that ; something to cause the sunbeams to flicker and fade, and the room to reel round, and the light of day to go out and be replaced by darkness.

It did not last long. When the mental swoon—for the faintness was more mental than physical—passed away, he was still sitting in his accustomed chair, and quite alone ; the paper before him, the sun streaming in at the window, the silence still unbroken.

'Loss of the North Wales.'

Ay, there it was in black and white. No delusion of the fancy ; no illusion of the senses. Loss of the North Wales ; the vessel in which Mr. Palthorpe was returning home. What had happened ? what did the paragraph say ? 'Left on such a date ; encountered a gale in latitudes so-and-so.' What did that signify ? He passed it over, and read on : 'Would not answer to the helm ; drifted before the wind ; sprang a leak ; made signals of distress, and the steamer Adrian came to their assistance. Most of the passengers and crew saved. All might have been got off ; but the sea ran so high two boats were swamped. Some of the rescued were transferred to a sailing vessel they fell in with a few days later. A list of the saved was appended. In it there appeared no such name as Palthorpe.'

A minute later, one of the clerks entering the room found his principal lying back in his chair white and trembling.

'Are you ill, sir ?' he asked, hurrying to his assistance.

'Give me some water, quick,' was the answer feebly spoken.

A carafe and tumbler stood on the table, and after swallowing a little he seemed to revive.

'Shall I go for a doctor, sir ?' asked the clerk.

'No ; I shall be well in a few minutes.'

More than half an hour passed, however, before he recovered sufficiently to rise and walk across the room. When he did so, it was with the manner of a man who felt dazed and bewildered. He went to the window and looked out on the dreary burying-ground, on the slanting headstones and ruined monuments, encrusted with soot and grime and dust, and the inscriptions they had once borne almost obliterated.

If the news which had come to him were true, the man whose return he dreaded lay in a wider grave. The waves were buffeting his body as fortune delighted to buffet him in life. He could return no more, to be broken-hearted, to find his home desolate, his wife false. He could seek no revenge, ask no reparation.

His short day was ended, and he would never know of the night that had shrouded it. Whilst they had been dreading his return the winds and the waves were singing his requiem; he would not trouble any one any more; the story, so far as he took part in it, was finished; his tale was told; his sun had set!

After a little Mr. Hay went out. At the end of the street he hailed a cab, and drove to the owners of the North Wales. They had further particulars; they knew all they supposed they ever should know. The captain was amongst the saved; he was very ill, and lay at Southampton. Substantially the report in the *Times* was correct in every particular. Mr. Palthorpe was not amongst those saved; he chanced to be in one of the boats that were swamped. The second mate, who had come to London, saw him go down. There were not many passengers. No hope could be entertained that Mr. Palthorpe survived. The mate had particularly lamented his fate; he was from the same part of the country, and spoke affectionately of him as the 'young squire.'

It was a bad business, but not so bad as it might have been; for if the Adrian had arrived a couple of hours later, not a living creature would have returned to England to tell the tale.

Yes, the mate could be seen in London; the captain, when sufficiently recovered to receive strangers, at Southampton.

'You may, however, I fear,' finished the ship-owner, 'take my assurance as correct that Mr. Palthorpe went down.'

'Still it will be a satisfaction,' murmured his visitor.

'Precisely so; I can perfectly understand your feeling. Was the poor gentleman a relation?'

'No, not a relation; only—only—a—"friend he was going to say; but the phrase seemed unsuitable; he had to find another word—"only an acquaintance. I was greatly interested in him, however. I think I will see the mate, and afterwards probably run down to Southampton.'

Still with that dazed feeling upon him he walked out into the street, and, hailing another cab, told the man to drive to The Aspens.

There the lilacs and hawthorns were all abloom; there the white spring flowers were dotting the ground like cushions of snow; the air was fresh and sweet and full of all pleasant scents, and the sky was as blue and unclouded as though the season had been summer and the country not England.

But for Mr. Hay all these good things were in vain. He hurried up to the front door, and entered the drawing-room, which was empty. The French windows leading out into the garden stood open; and looking down one of the alleys he saw a figure standing near the fountain; a graceful lissom figure, dressed in black sweeping garments.

She stood motionless, regarding the water as it flashed up into the sunlight, and then fell in tiny showers back into the basin. She had no shawl around her shoulders, no covering over her head; there was something desolate and sorrowful and forlorn in her attitude and her repose—something unconsciously pathetic and lovely,

which caused the beholder to feel far more sorry for the erring woman than ever she had felt for herself.

He could not endure to contemplate her thus, overwrought, repentant, remorseful, stricken. He did not pause another moment, but went straight to where she stood idly looking at the water flashing and sparkling in the sun.

At sound of his approach she turned.

'What, you here?' she said, and the folds of her rich silk dress rustled on the ground as she moved so as to face him.

'Yes, I am here,' he answered; and the tone of his voice sounded strange and unfamiliar.

She moved from the fountain, and came close up to the edge of the grass where he had paused.

'You have heard something,' she said.

Between these two there was no need of much speech or explanation.

'Yes; I have heard something,' he answered.

He was white even to his lips, as she had been a moment before; but now the blood rushed into her cheeks, and deluged them with crimson as she cried,

'He has come!'

Mr. Hay shook his head.

'Have you not seen the paper this morning?' he asked.

'No; I never look at a paper. Why do you ask me?'

'Because there is news in it.'

'He is dead!' she cried.

'He is dead,' he answered; and they looked at each other for an instant in silence.

As if in a mirror, he, gazing on her, saw the reflection of what was in his own heart. He read it in her eyes, in the relaxed muscles, in the parted lips, in the expression of ineffable relief.

'My God!' he said, 'you are glad!'

She turned her head aside slowly, bent her eyes on the ground, and then replied,

'Yes, I am glad.'

For a moment neither spoke; the silence was not broken save by the man's laboured hurried breathing, and the notes of a bird singing blithely on a branch hard by.

All around them was beauty and repose. The leaves scarcely moved in the light wind; the drops of water falling from the fountain sparkled like diamonds in the air; a thousand sweet perfumes made the garden odorous. Everything was still and lovely; but vaguely the man felt there would be peace for him no more; that, as he advanced in life, he would be tossed by rougher tempests than that in which the dead man had been lulled to rest.

'Why should I be sorry?' the woman who had been that dead man's wife went on, after that moment's pause. 'We can say we are so if you like, but we should both know to the contrary. I am glad and you are glad. We are,' she persisted, as he made a depreciating gesture. 'Why should we be sorry? It is better for him too. If he had come home, what was there before him? He is better dead.'

Ay, better dead—ay, far, far better than to have his heart riven by the news which awaited his return—to find the restless ocean more constant than a woman—a feather in the breeze less fickle than she who had borne his name and lain in his bosom.

'But you were fond of him once.' Though that rejoicing and that indifference were both true, they so appalled him, he was forced to give utterance to an expression which had before escaped him.

Rather, ay a thousand times rather, would he have seen her, the tears streaming down her cheeks, her features convulsed with grief, than taking the tidings which had shaken him, unmoved by any sentiment save that of relief.

' You were fond of him once, surely,' he repeated.

' That was then and this is now,' she answered sullenly; and Mr. Hay stood mute.

That and this, was and is, then and now: if she had written a volume about the matter, she could not have put it more clearly before him, than in the seven words she spoke. It was for this—*this*, the man with all the best years of his life before him had given up wealth, station, and friends; it was for this he had let the old place pass away to strangers, and gone out himself to work for daily bread; for this he had laboured, and toiled, and saved, and planned; for this end—that the woman he loved, and that he married, should shed no tears for his loss, but say, with dry eyes and a smile of relief, ' He is better dead.'

The winds and the waves were kinder to the drowning man than the wife for whose sake he had given up his commission in the world's army and gone forth into the ranks. On the face of God's earth there is no creature so little pitiful as a selfish woman, and this woman was selfish to her heart's core.

Standing there, with the sunlight and the shadows playing at hide and seek around her—with her marvellous beauty set all about with the accessories of flowers, trees, sparkling water, delicious scents; with her smooth brow, her wealth of hair, her perfect features, her wonderful eyes—a painter would ask nothing better than to sketch her

as she was, without a change of position or of expression.

For her gaze was bent on the dim distance, as though, with all the power of a great mind, she was striving to solve some mighty question, some intricate problem—the regeneration of the human race, it might have seemed to an outsider. If she had been handed down thus to posterity, with no biography attached to the fair face, many a one in the time to come must have marvelled concerning the subject occupying her mind—the mystery of existence which was perplexing her.

' What did he die off?' she asked suddenly. She had not been thinking of him in the very least; but the matter she was considering chanced to bring her round to the fact of her widowhood.

Mr. Hay did not answer verbally; instead, he gave her the paper, pointing to that particular paragraph which had that morning come for a time between him and the sunshine.

Then he left her to read it in solitude; and going to the bottom of the garden, paced up and down a strip of grass wide and long which lay along the fence. He was thinking deeply. Heavens! he had something to think about, while the birds sang loud, and the fountain glittered, and the flowers bloomed, and light white clouds sailed peacefully over the blue sky—something he should never forget till he could hear and see no sound or sight of earth any more.

She came to him hurriedly, came down the broad smooth walk with rapid steps, holding the paper in her hand.

' John!' she cried, and he heard her breath was short and quick as his had been when he began to tell his news.

He stopped, and she drew close

to where he stood. 'It may not be true,' she went on; 'he may come back after all.'

He looked at her for a second, and then turned away. Again he saw, as in a mirror, the reflection of that terrible thought, which had passed through his own heart. *She was afraid he might come back. She hoped he was dead.*

*He had feared the man might come back. He hoped he was dead.* Not darkly, but face to face, he beheld the features of that awful dread and frightful desire. With the mask for a moment torn aside, he saw the loathsome spectacle of his inmost feelings changed from their former integrity, all the honour destroyed, the purity vanished, eaten away, slowly but surely, by the cancer of sin.

'How are we to know he has not been saved somehow?' she asked, finding he did not answer her previous remark.

With an effort the man spoke. 'He was in one of the boats that were swamped,' he said hoarsely. 'He was seen to go down.' And then unable to bear more he went into the house, covering his face with his hands, and ejaculated rather than prayed, 'O God, forgive me! O God, help me!' the while his head was bent before the Maker he had offended.

As for Mrs. Palthorpe, she sat down on a garden-bench, and considered over and over again the question which had before been occupying her mind.

'Will he marry, or leave me? Will he leave, or marry me?'

Ceaselessly as a child repeats some rhyme she rang the changes on those words.

A few hours before, the question had seemed comparatively remote; now it was one which could not be evaded or delayed.

## ON SOME QUAINT CUSTOMS.

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THERE is no doubt that we are, as a nation, essentially Conservative in thought and feeling. We love what is old, what precedent has allowed, what antiquity has preserved, what history has commemorated. When some comparatively new thing has to be done, we do not rely upon our own sense and judgment for the conduct of the affair, but we search back into the past for some course which precedent has sanctioned. Unlike America, we have little confidence in our own administration of matters, unless backed up by authority. Yankee Doodle sneers at the past, and, contrary to John Bull, believes only in the active go-ahead present, which must open out into a glorious and triumphant future. Lord Palmerston, in one of his election speeches, happily hit off the difference that existed between the two countries. In England, he said, if a man takes an inn he calls it the Old Hat, or some name which implies that the hostel is no brand-new affair ; and if a rival comes into the field he does not call his opposition establishment the New Hat or the Renovated Bonnet, but he seeks to out-Herod Herod, and so, to make what is ancient still more ancient, he styles his house the Old, Old Hat. In America he would christen the caravanserai by some title which would savour little of the past, but much of the modern. With us antiquity has its sentimental side as well as its historical ; in the States, where there is no history, it is the future which is softened by sentiment, not the past.

I am led to make these remarks whilst staying with one who has had the misfortune to have had his name pricked as High-Sheriff for his county. Like many of the landed gentry who can boast of a fair descent, my friend has quite enough to do with his money. What with the charges upon the estate for the payment of his sister's portion, farms thrown upon his hands, remitting of rents during seasons of agricultural distress, the constant repairs and improvements he is called upon to perform, charities, local subscriptions, and the like, he is, to put it kindly, far from a Croesus. In vain he raised his voice in remonstrance against being elevated to the office ; there were many men in the county—new men, it is true—who would be only too pleased to occupy the post, who would spend their money with profusion, and whose wives would be immensely delighted at the honour conferred upon their husbands. But the judges, 'on the morrow of St. Martin,' did not send in the names of these *nouveaux riches* to their sovereign ; they chose my friend with two others, and, as luck would have it, *mon ami*, because in this funny world he did *not* want what so many were scheming after, was selected.

And now for a whole year his life is to be one of worry and pecuniary anxiety. A shy man, hating publicity and indifferent to honours, he is to be the first man in his county, a great magnate, and taking precedence during his term of office of even the

**Lord-Lieutenant.** Content with his modest duties as a 'beak,' hesitating in his speech, fond of the quiet and seclusion of his home life, what, he piteously asks, has he done that he should be subject for a whole year to this torture? What is the use of the office? He does nothing; and whenever by chance there is anything to be done, it is his attorney, the Under-Sheriff, who has that task to perform. He is only an ornament, useless to the country and a needless expense to himself. 'Begad,' he sighs, 'it is enough to make a man a Radical and go in for reform all round!'

As his guest, I commiserate with him in his misfortune. He had been saving up a little money during the last year to build a stone wall round that part of his park which abutted on the village road, and to drain an out-lying farm, and now this sum would have to be expended in sustaining a useless dignity. He has had to put his servants in new liveries, and to add to his establishment. Some men perform the duties of sheriff in a very shabby manner; but the pride of my friend here steps in, and as the thing has to be done, he is of opinion, for the sake of his name, that it should be done well. He has a chaplain, and of course has presented him with a handsome silk gown; 'that doesn't cost much,' says he, 'though for the money I could have put up those gates at Durleigh' (a farm very much dilapidated). The contents of his stable and coach-houses are unsuited to his new dignity. He has hired from a London maker an imposing carriage, and from a well-known jobber in town horses about seventeen hands high.

If my friend hates his part, he acts it very well. The assizes have

been opened at the neighbouring town, and there the high-sheriff has had to proceed to attend upon the judge. How I pitied him as he paced up and down the little office of the attorney, nervous and fidgety, before being driven off to the house of the administrator of the law! Got up in his deputy-lieutenant's uniform he looked very stately; but those who knew him could see the funk he was in, for the judge on this particular circuit, having risen from the lowest round of the law, was exceedingly lofty, and exacted considerable homage from all who had to attend upon him. It was reported that in this very town he had reprimanded a former sheriff like a servant, because something had gone wrong or some little inattention had been paid him. Of course it is perfectly right that the judges, as representatives of the sovereign, should be treated with every dignity and respect; but do we not sometimes go a little too far in this matter? After all, is not the high-sheriff an officer representing the Crown, and why should he be called upon to play so submissive a rôle before a judge? 'Just like a flunkey!' moans my friend. I look out of the windows of the under-sheriff's office, the chaplain sitting on a chair close to me, resplendent in his new gown, reading the newspaper, and I see some one quite as nervous, only with more temper about him, as my friend. It is Newman, the excellent coachman of the high-sheriff. At first it was difficult to recognise him. A most respectable man, with the slight failing of his class for beer, he holds the proud post of sergeant in the local Volunteer force. With the permission of his master he has for the last few months been doing his best to grow a moustache, and at last had suc-

ceeded in developing a most wonderful tooth-brush sort of article, very black and standing straight out like bayonets ready to receive cavalry. But man proposes! The care and cultivation of the last few months have been expended in vain. Not only had the moustache to go, but the whiskers, the object of adoration in every servants' hall for miles around, had also to be shaved. Behold him now seated on the box of the hired coach, in front of the jobbed horses, in all the bravery of his new livery, stockings, and well-fitting wig. Yet is he livid with rage. The policemen, who do the duty of the javelin-men of old, have not yet come up, and a crowd stands around the coach and chaff unmercifully the shorn Jehu. 'Hallo, Newman! nothing like lots of cheek, eh?' 'Cold about the gills, old man?' 'As you was, sergeant! wouldn't you like to be?' 'Don't you take it so to 'art, old cock! a little gunpowder and lard, and you'll be all right again!' 'Blest if he ain't had all his 'air taken off! what are yer suffering from, eh? pimples?' and so on. Newman looks at the jokers as if he were afraid of them, and yet would like to get down and give them a thrashing all round. In the glitter in his eye I fancy I can detect beer.

And now the police move up and surround the coach, the high-sheriff gets in, then his chaplain, and the vehicle drives off to take up the judge. Off I hasten to the court, and stand upon the steps outside the building. Soon the carriage drives up, the sheriff gets out, and precedes the judge clad in his robes up the steps. 'I feel like a beadle,' mutters my friend as he passes me. A rush is made for the inside of the court. There on the bench is my lord, and there

next him is the sheriff. The judge is talking to him, and pointing to the little brass candle-holders that jut out from each side of his desk. Something wrong evidently. I see my friend flush up and quit the bench. 'What is the matter?' I ask. 'Wrong sort of candles—they are composite, and he wants wax; ought to be a grocer for this kind of business,' he replies as he hurries off. Unhappy useless dignitary! There he sits during the whole day, listening to tedious and perhaps sickening details of crime, breathing a fetid atmosphere, till the assizes are at an end. He has to entertain the judges; he has to take a prominent part in all county matters; he is the sovereign of his shire for the time being; he is an important guest at all festivities; he may even have to hang a man. Yet in reality what practical use is he? Why should the office continue to be a burden to many men who can ill afford it, and an empty dignity to those who can support it? Every county has its lord-lieutenant, its deputy-lieutenants, and its bench of magistrates; surely a shire, however turbulent or active, ought to be able to be controlled by these functionaries, without calling on an additional officer? But no: we cling to the past, and because a high-sheriff in the olden days, when men were more aggressive than they are now, when robberies and depredations frequently took place, and nobles exercised their feudal rights, was a real and useful official, so we in these days of civilisation, police regulations, and regular administration of the law, deem it right that he should still be in existence. Therefore, O *mon ami*, you may plead in vain! You have been pricked as high-sheriff: you may be unsuited for its duties, your rent

roll may render you unfit for the post, you may have hitherto led a life of rigid seclusion ; but all your excuses will be useless, and you will have to serve—unless you prefer to pay a handsome fine.

There is another institution as superfluous as the office of high-sheriff. We have judges and juries, both petty and special. Of what use, pray, is that body of men which, when sworn, is loftily styled the Grand Jury ? All that it does could equally be performed by the ordinary jury. It seldom throws out a bill ; for every case brought before it has been well considered by a magistrate previous to being sent for trial ; it listens to evidence which will have to be repeated ; its decision means nothing ; and it is only, to men actively engaged in business, another word for a waste of three days. Why not let it be abolished, together with the various other anachronisms that surround this practical, utilitarian, nineteenth-century life ? Look around and see how the relics of the past cling to us without serving any available purpose. There was a time within the memory of men now not middle-aged when bishops wore wigs ; they now wear their own hair, to the cool comfort of themselves, and without endangering their episcopal authority. Why should not the bench and bar follow their example ? Why in a fetid court and on a sweltering summer day should a barrister be compelled to plead in court in a hot and heavy wig ? and why should forensic etiquette command a judge to be swaddled up in coloured and ludicrous robes as he listens from the serene heights of the bench to the pleadings below ? No unprejudiced mind will say that such costumes give a dignity to the judge, which it would be unwise to deprive him

of ; on the contrary, they tend to lower him by making him an object of ridicule in the eyes of the public. How infinitely more stern and majestic the judges appear when deciding cases in a simple black gown ! Abolish the ugly and bald-producing wig, and we shall have one anachronism the less amongst us. Our dandies do not go about in lace, ruffles, and velvet, with a clouded cane in their hand, and a jewelled sword at their sides. Why should the bar and bench maintain a costume which, to the modern way of thinking, is equally obsolete ?

In one important matter, however, reform seems imminent. Our marriage laws appear at last to be on the eve of alteration. What can be more dull than the ordinary marriage ceremony ? The service and festivities take place at a time which, without exhausting the day, cuts it up and completely wastes it. The religious service is to be performed before twelve ; who does not know the weary hours that precede the breakfast, the sad consequences of taking champagne freely in the middle of the day, the dubious hilarity, the departure of the principal performers in the ceremony, the break up of the affair ? And then what to do ? The day is wasted ; you cannot dine, you are unsettled ; and the probability is you go to the club and fall fast asleep over a book, and thus to your day's misery add a long and restless night. All this, it is hoped, will now be changed. In the old days of the disgraceful Fleet marriages the law did good service in limiting the hours during which the ceremony might be performed. But why should any limitation now be in force ? How far preferable in every way would a marriage be performed later in the day, with a dinner instead of

a breakfast, and the happy couple starting off for their hotel or country house in the sentimental gloaming of the eventide instead of in the staring and inquisitive glare of the afternoon! And whilst on this point, could not the marriage reformers overhaul the marriage service, and in fact generally curtail the whole of the clerical ceremony?

From the parson to the squire is but a step. There is one curious custom which we should do well to abolish without delay. Ever since men have been able to read and consider, 'justices' justice' has been a byword and a reproach. Why should a man, often with no legal training, and occasionally even below the rest of the community in intellectual attainments, simply because he holds property in the neighbourhood, or occupies a conspicuous position in the district, be put into the commission of the peace, and lay down the law for his neighbour? He is neither a lawyer nor a judge, yet he calmly, with the aid of the indispensable clerk, performs the duties of both functionaries. Hence we hear of those peculiar decisions which jar against our humanity and sense of justice. In one county we read of a sentence of six weeks' imprisonment passed upon a hungry vagrant who, wandering in a field, steals and eats a few turnips; whilst in another county, a drunken man who has half murdered his wife,

with the assistance of his boots and a handy poker, receives eight days' hard labour. Punishment appears to be inflicted haphazard and on no settled terms. Such anomalies could not exist if the law was administered by proper and qualified agents. Why should our great towns be ruled by the decisions of stipendiary magistrates, whilst our smaller market-towns are left to the tender mercies, and often crass ignorance, of justices of the peace? It is a relic of the feudal ages that can well be relegated to the lumber-room of other feudal relics. Throughout the land stipendiary magistrates should be established to dispense justice according to the text of the Statute-book, and not as the sympathies or prejudices of the individual may dictate. Dogberry is not such an ornament to the country that we should be anxious to preserve him.

To wade through the list of quaint customs which we still follow in our social and political life would be too long a task. An old country like ours, with an historical past, and in which freedom has slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent, must of needs preserve much of its antiquity in many of its customs and observances. But when such customs are at variance with the practical spirit of the age, he is no friend to his race who gives his vote in favour of their preservation.

## NOTHINGS.

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ONLY some withered blossoms,  
Crumbling to dry decay ;  
Only a glove half torn in two,  
And idly thrown away ;  
Only a heart that's breaking—  
That is if hearts could break ;  
Only a man adrift for life,  
All for a woman's sake.

Only a few such tokens  
Prized by a love-sick fool,  
Naught but the ashes that strew the ground  
When love's hot flame grows cool.  
Not the first man by thousands  
The dupe of a heartless flirt ;  
Not the first time that priceless love  
Was treated like common dirt.

Only in jest ! You know it  
Now, though it's rather late ;  
Rather too late to turn in your life  
And seek another fate.  
You're not a man like thousands,  
With a heart that will veer and twirl,  
And feel a glow at the word and glance  
Of every flirting girl.

Finished for ever, and done ;  
Wrecked by a treacherous smile ;  
Following madly a will-o'-the-wisp,  
Happy, if but for a while.  
Only a heart that's broken—  
That is if hearts could break ;  
Only a man adrift for life,  
All for a woman's sake.

G. E. C.

## LOVE AND WAR.\*

BY R. MOUNTENEY JEPHSON,

AUTHOR OF 'TOM BULLKEY OF LISSINGTON,' 'A PINK WEDDING,' ETC.

### CHAPTER VI.

MR. BUDDLECOMBE was no exception to the general rule that every man has two sides to his nature. The one first presented to the reader happened to be the rough side; but, as already stated, or rather implied, Mr. Buddlecombe had a smooth one, and it is now the pleasanter task of the chronicler to show our worshipful mayor *this* side uppermost.

Between the gentle zephyr fanning the soft cheek of a fair maiden and the fierce hurricane devastating all in its path there is not much more difference than between Mr. Buddlecombe as he is now about to appear, and Mr. Buddlecombe as the reader last saw him, dashing his newspaper on the floor, giving his servants warning all round, railing at the defenders of his country, abusing the friend of his youth, storming at the wife of his bosom, and fiercely hurling at his innocent offspring such epithets as 'Prattling idiot' and 'Babbling booby.'

It has been deemed advisable to open this chapter with the foregoing preliminary remarks, as the reader would not otherwise recognise Mr. Buddlecombe in the dapper beaming old gentleman who now entered his own snug library, resplendent in a snowy shirt-front, white waistcoat, glossy

pumps—in short, dressed for dinner.

It is common to most fidgety old gentlemen to become happy and docile after dinner; but Mr. Buddlecombe had lately, by taking a leaf from Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, hit upon a method of snatching an anteprandial dream of joy from life's fitful sleep.

'Ah, little Florrikins,' he said, on entering the room, this mode of address, if frivolous for a mayor, being still a marked as well as remarkable improvement on 'babbling booby,' 'it was a bright idea that reading over the *maynoo* together every evening before dinner, wasn't it, you saucy little puss?'

'Yes, papa dear, a very bright idea,' acquiesced Florence, adding aside, with a surreptitious pout, 'Horrible sacrilege, reading a nasty bill of fare after Algy's *billet-doux*!'

'And here in this nice little room, replete with every comfort, we are always secure from interruption,' continued Mr. Buddlecombe, beaming all round him. 'The half-hour immediately preceding dinner is usually the heaviest period of the day, but *noos avong shongshay toot cela*. How the possession of a French cook does brush up one's French, to be sure! One seems to be, as it were, absorbing the language into one's very system. It is certainly a delightful way of acquiring a foreign tongue, and is immeasurably superior to Ollendorf's method

\* The author reserves to himself the right of dramatising this story, or any portion of it.

after this manner : "Do you love the white hat of the virtuous chimney-sweeper ? *Answer* : No ; because my fine grandmother has eaten the green parasol of the magnanimous cabinet - maker." That was the style of thing I used to hear you at with your governess, eh, Florry ?

'Yes, papa dear.'

'We spend this half-hour very pleasantly together in the calm joys of anticipation, don't we, little Florry ?' said Mr. Buddlecombe, as he playfully chucked his daughter under the chin, and then took his seat in an arm-chair.

'Yes, papa dear,' acquiesced Florence, adding aside, as she seated herself on a low stool by her father's chair, 'To me this half-hour to-night will be the most trying I have ever passed.'

'I have considerably enhanced the pleasures of the evening by abstaining from lunch lately,' chuckled Mr. Buddlecombe ; 'for, as the poet sweetly observes, "Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder" (patting the lower portion of his waistcoat)—"fond foolish heart !'

'*Absence*, papa dear, the poet said ; 'not *abstinence*,' remarked Florence.

'Well, darling, it's all the same,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, patting his daughter's golden head with a tender playfulness. 'By absence he of course meant absence from a meal ; and what is that but abstinence ? Ah, Florry, Florry, you matter-of-fact little puss, you've no soul for poetry.'

'O, how I wish papa would look at Algy in the light of a *pâté de foie gras* or a *Périgord pie* !' sighed Florence, as she turned to the table for the *ménage*.

'Now, Florry,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, leaning back in his chair, crossing his legs, and bringing the

tips of his fingers together, 'commence, my dear. And, Florry, read, you know, as they say in your music-books, *con expressione*, *con MOLTO expressione*, my child.'

'What a dreadful old *gourmand* this French cook is turning papa into !' murmured Florence behind the *menu*. 'His voice is actually trembling with emotion, and he's turning his eyes up as if he were saying his prayers !'

'Go on, Florence, and pay great attention to your elocution, my dear.'

'*Potages*,' began Florence, in resigned tones.

'Stop, Florry. There should be no extraneous distractions. I've sat on my bunch of keys. There, that's all right. Proceed, my child.'

And Mr. Buddlecombe composed himself to listen with a rapt expression of countenance.

'*Potages*.'

'*Potages*,' softly echoed Mr. Buddlecombe.

'*Tortue claire*.'

'*Tortoo claire* : Clear turtle. Very good.'

'And *consommé de volaille aux quenelles*.'

'*Congosomay de*—I say, Florry, that's a stumper. What does it mean ?'

'I don't know exactly, papa dear.'

'Neither do I. It will be a pleasant surprise, no doubt. It sounds delicious.'

'*Poissons*.'

'*Poisson* : Fish. Good.'

'*Turböt, sauce Hollandaise* ; *saumon racolé à la Tartare*.'

'Aha, that's the Tartar I like catching,' gently interpolated Mr. Buddlecombe, with a soft smile.

'*Entrée*.'

'*Ongtray* : Come in. Come in, by all means,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, with a playful and peculiar significance, as he tapped a waistcoat button.

*'Suprême de volaille aux truffes; filets de pigeons de Bordeaux; purée aux champignons.'*

'Read that again, Florry,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, in tones of gentle ecstasy; '*ongcore, ongcore*, my sweet child. It falls softly and soothingly on the ear like evening bells, dinner-bells.'

Resignedly Florence acceded to the *encore*.

'What a b-e-autiful language French is! it appeals so to the heart,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, again laying his hand tenderly on the lower portion of his waistcoat. 'Proceed, little blue-eyed sweetener of my old age.'

*'Côtelettes de mouton à l'Anglaise'*—well, I suppose in plain language that's mutton-chops,' said Florence, laying the card on her knee and looking up at her father, who started as if a serpent had stung him.

'Florence, you disgusting booby, hold your tongue!' he exclaimed.

'O, of course, I recollect the romantic episode of the mutton-chops and the mastiff,' muttered Florence *sotto voce*, as she turned away her head to conceal a smile.

'Ring the bell, Florence,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, adding aside, 'I must take something to wash down that disagreeable reminiscence.'

Florence rose, rang the bell, and resumed her seat.

'I did think,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, tapping the carpet furiously with one foot, 'I did think that when I had a French cook I should not have such things as mutton-chops for dinner. Or if such an abomination as a mutton-chop were presented at my table, it would have been so disguised that its own sheep would not have known it. But *à l'Onglay* evidently means the article in all its normal repulsiveness of gristle and

fat. O, you know, the fellow ought to have his salary cut down to that of a major-general, or whatever those old cutthroats in cocked hats call themselves.'

At this point the obsequious Spigot entered the room in response to Florence's summons.

'Spigot, sherry and bitters. And *do* look sharp; that is, if your natural cast of countenance does not render that an impossibility,' said Mr. Buddlecombe.

'Certainly, your worship,' said Spigot, hastily withdrawing.

*'Revenons à nos moutons'*, said Florence, a little spitefully, I fear. '*Relevés*—'

'*Revnong à no moutong*, indeed! Don't dare to do anything of the sort. Hold your tongue, miss; and don't go on until I tell you.'

'Good gracious!' thought Florence, with a fearful sinking at heart; 'if such a trifle puts him out in this way, what will he do, O what *will* he do when the announcement, which may be made at any moment, that an officer from the barracks is actually in the house breaks rudely in upon his dreams of *tortue claire* and *volaille aux truffes*?'

Fortunately—for the present at all events—the oil—in the shape of sherry and bitters—which was to be poured on the troubled waters of Mr. Buddlecombe's soul speedily arrived; and with the first sip he became not only calm, but even placid.

'Well, well,' he remarked, without the least signs of the recent passion, which had come and passed with the suddenness of a Mediterranean squall, 'there is no rose without a thorn, and no *may-noo*, I suppose, without a bitter pill. Now go on, Florry; *con molto espressione*, don't forget that, my child.'

*'Relevés: Chapons rôtis au Périgord.'*

'Good again. Capons roasted as they do them at Périgord. By the way, Périgord is a town in France, is it not? You learned geography last, Florry.'

'Yes, papa, a town in the east of France, I think; famed for the manufacture of raised pies.'

'Yes, yes, yes, to be sure. Raised pies! what an elevated form of industry! Dear me, what a graceful little interchange of civic compliments, what a delicate method of cementing the *ong-tongte cordial*, it would be if the Mayors of Périgord and Puddleton were to present each other with specimens of the native industries of their respective towns! I'm sure I would give him as many buttons as he liked in exchange for an equal number of Périgord pies. I'll think over the matter. Go on, pretty little golden-haired solace of my sera and yellow leaf.'

*'Hanche de venaison aux—'*

'Hush, Florence. You read that over a *leettle* too hurriedly—I might almost say irreverently. We have now arrived, so to speak, at the very zenith of the cook's efforts, and we should not treat the same in a spirit of levity. *This is the way—'*

Here the Mayor extended his hand ready for emphasis, turned up his eyes, cleared his throat, and was just on the point of showing his daughter how to render rhetorical justice to 'the very zenith of the cook's efforts,' when Spigot entered the room, and threw the following metaphorical bombshell at his worship's feet:

'A gentleman wants to see your worship immediately on a pressing matter of business.'

'Heavens!' mentally ejaculated Florence, as she dropped the tire-some bill of fare, and clasped her hands; 'this must be Algy! Madness!'

*'Wants to see me at this hour?'*

said Mr. Buddecombe furiously. ' Didn't you tell him I was engaged, Spigot? '

'I did, your worship; but he wouldn't go,' replied Spigot, glancing in astonishment at his young mistress, and wondering what on earth Miss Florence was tearing her pretty little lace handkerchief to pieces for.

'Wouldn't go!' said Mr. Buddecombe. ' And I do wish to goodness, Spigot, that *you* wouldn't go rolling about your eyes in that way. Keep those idiotic ocular demonstrations till you've got a fit yourself, or want to frighten an old woman into one.'

'Certainly, your worship,' replied the meek Spigot, fixing his master with a winkless glare until his eyes watered.

'Who is it?' asked Mr. Buddecombe. ' Who dares to come at this hour when— Don't stare like a stuck pig, Spigot! '

'Certainly not, your worship. I—I—I think, if you please, your worship, it's—it's—it's—a—a—'

'Do not stammer, Spigot. There are few things more irritating to a listener than stammering; and irritation just before a meal is to be specially avoided. It plays the deuce with the gastric juices. Who is it? '

'Well, your most worshipful worship,' faltered Spigot, surreptitiously laying hold of the door-handle behind him as a first step to a hasty retreat should circumstances necessitate one, ' it's a gent from the barracks, your worship.'

'An individual from the barracks! want to see *me*!' exclaimed Mr. Buddecombe, jumping up; while Florence, trembling from head to foot, seized a book, opened it upside down, and pretended to be absorbed in its contents.

'Such is his outrageous request, your worship. Here's his card.'

'Why didn't you give it to me before?' said Mr. Buddlecombe, snatching the small piece of pasteboard.

'Well, knowing your worship's dislike to the military, I thought it best not to be too sudden in the announcement, your worship,' explained Spigot, while Mr. Buddlecombe adjusted his glasses.

"Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner, the Queen's Own Fusiliers," said Mr. Buddlecombe, reading the superscription on the card, which he held at arm's length and surveyed with upturned nose, as if it were something noxious and nasty. 'Now what, in the name of wonder, can Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner of the Queen's Own Slaughterers, or whatever they call themselves, want with me? What, in the wildest flights of the human fancy, can Mr. Algernon Fitzmaurice Warriner of the Queen's Own Brain-spatterers, and the worshipful Mayor of Puddleton, be supposed to have in common?'

'I can see papa is working himself up into one of his paroxysms of rage,' murmured the pale trembling little Florence, as, with her head still bent over the reversed book, she anxiously gazed through her long lashes at her excitable parent. 'With his violent temper there may be murder. I'll remove everything that might offer itself to his hand as a weapon.'

And in this very merciful spirit of precaution Florence, watching her opportunities, succeeded in pocketing, one after another, such deadly engines of carnage as a paper-knife, a pair of scissors, and a bodkin.

'How can people be so reckless as to leave such things about?' whimpered Florence, as she pounced on the last, and pocketed it as if it had been what bodkins used to be in Shakespeare's time, a dag-

ger with which any one tired of life 'might his quietus make,' or any other man's. 'It's positively murder made easy.'

While Florence's hands were thus busily engaged, Mr. Buddlecombe's tongue was not idle.

'I call this invasion of my privacy an outrage, a brutal outrage. Is he sober, Spigot?'

'Well, as sober, your worship, as can be expected from the military. Leastways he conducts himself with tolerable propriety, considering.'

'I'm astonished at it. Is he in his senses, then?'

'Well, in as much as he's got, your worship, I should imagine.'

'Gracious!' mentally ejaculated Florence, with a shudder, 'there's the poker, papa's favourite weapon, I should think! I *must* have it. I daresay I'll be able to get hold of it and hide it while papa is engaged with that cringing old sycophant.'

'Where did you leave him, Spigot?' asked Mr. Buddlecombe.

'Well, knowing your worship's very proper antipathy to the military, I left him on the doorstep, your worship.'

'Old wretch!' muttered Florence, with a contemptuous glance at Spigot, as she sidled towards the fender.

'And a very proper place too, Spigot. And did you shut the door?'

'I did your worship.'

'In his face?'

'Right in his face, your worship.'

'With a bang?'

'With a most fearful bang, your worship.'

'Spigot, you may have your faults, but I must say there *are* occasions when you evince a great deal of delicate tact. I do not say that if you had kicked him down the stairs you would not have shown still greater tact. But we can-

not expect— Florence, what are you trying to do with that poker?

For a moment or two poor Florence was completely scared, and stood, mute and motionless, with the article in question behind her back, where she had whisked it just too late to evade her parent's vision.

'O, it's—it's—it's such a pretty poker, pa,' she at last stammered out, on recovering just sufficient presence of mind to make a wild attempt at an explanation. 'I was thinking it would make such a—such a sweet ornament for my châtelaine. Will you— and here she placed her hands on his shoulders and looked coaxingly up into his face—"give it to me, papa dear?"

A strange unnatural calm, such as sudden and extreme bewilderment occasionally produces even on the most excitable temperaments, came over Mr. Buddlecombe.

'Does history furnish any records of insane mayors?' he gloomily asked, while Florence, with the poker still clasped in her hand, continued to hang on to his shoulders. 'Or is it reserved for me to figure as the first on that mournful list? I wonder, if I go mad during my mayoralty, whether they'll present me with a silver straitjacket? Here's my only child, on whose education no expense has been spared, and who has hitherto betrayed no marked symptoms of idiocy nor any special mania for fire-irons, beseeching me in tender and imploring accents to "give her the pretty poker, pa;" while simultaneously a member of the windpipe-slitting brain-spattering profession called the army drops in at the sacred hour of dinner, just for all the world as if I were dotingly fond of the species. It's really enough— Here, get away with

you! Put that poker down at once, Florence, and go up to your mother! Do you hear me? Put that poker in its right place, miss. Well, if you won't, I will.'

Snatching the poker from Florence, who at once began to cry, Mr. Buddlecombe excitedly threw it into the half-open drawer of the library-table, near which he was standing.

'There,' said he, as he closed the drawer with a bang, 'I'm the only one in the whole house who has got a head in an emergency, and keeps cool and collected. Go to your mother, Florence.'

'I can't leave them alone together,' sobbed Florence, as she moved towards the door, pouring her muffled plaint into a diminutive bundle of rags which ten minutes before had been a dainty little lace handkerchief. 'I'll go out, and then slip back behind that screen; and if Algy *does* come in, and papa makes a murderous onslaught upon him with the poker, I'll rush between them and receive the deathblow on my own head. "'Tis so for me that Algy'd do, and so will I for him."

This last beautiful sentiment was nearly choked with sobs.

'So glad I took the other things away, though,' she added, brightening up a little as she put her hand in her pocket, and felt the paper-knife, the pair of scissors, and the bodkin.

'It's impossible this individual can have any business with me,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, as soon as the door had closed on Florence.

'Quite, your worship,' said Spigot, whose anxiety to tell his master that he had put the poker into the table-drawer was restrained by a dread amounting almost to a certainty that he, the informant, would have it thrown at his head for his pains if he did so.

'It is some impertinent attempt at a vulgar practical joke. I sha'n't see him. Tell him to go about his business—that's to say if a military man *has* business anywhere.'

'Yes, your worship.'

'Here, take back his card. Say I don't want it. Now where the deuce did I put it? I must have dropped it in this drawer; I recollect it was open. He may keep—Now do look where Florence has put that poker; in the drawer, actually, of my writing-table, amongst all my papers! Could any one believe that a girl on whose education no expense has been spared could be so giddy? Confound the poker, and the card too! Here, tell the individual on the doorstep to go away.'

'Yes, your worship,' said Spigot, retiring.

'Here, Spigot.'

'Your worship.'

'You may put it rather stronger than that. Tell him to go to the—. You understand, Spigot.'

'Perfectly, your worship.'

'Stay a moment, Spigot. You are an old and faithful retainer of the family.'

'I am indeed, your worship.'

'At an early age, when a factory boy, you narrowly escaped being worked up into buttons, through being caught in the machinery.'

'Had I been, your worship, I trust that as buttons I should not have disgraced the firm.'

The Mayor of Puddleton was visibly touched.

'And I do further trust, your worship, that I should not have been military buttons, nor had any device or motto of a warlike nature stamped upon me.'

'O, do you know?' said the Mayor, quite carried away by this last, 'a person capable of such beautiful sentiments, no matter

how far-fetched, must not be sacrificed to military brutality. No, Spigot, I shall not expose you to the risk of delivering that message. It would probably lead to your being knocked down and trampled upon.'

'I should be proud of falling in your worship's service.'

'No, I prefer your standing up for me. Tell this individual to go away, and that if he *has* any business with me he can communicate it by letter to my office tomorrow morning. And further, impress upon him the utter hopelessness of any attempt on his part to obtain even a *transient* view of me this evening, much less an *interview*.'

'Very good, your worship.'

And Spigot was at last allowed to withdraw.

Gentle reader, I here pause at the conclusion of this chapter to ask you, in the language of the betting-ring, what odds you are prepared to lay against the successful termination of Algernon War-riner's design of dining this very evening with the Mayor of Puddleton, by that civic worthy's own invitation?

## CHAPTER VII.

'O, do you know, one's digestive organs are completely upset by this affair,' testily remarked the Mayor on being left alone, adding, in a querulous whine, 'I haven't half the appetite I had. I'll try and coax it back. I'll just read over the *maynoo* quietly to myself. Where is it? Where is the *maynoo*? What can have become of— Well, I declare if it's not on the floor, where that Florence has dropped it, just as if it was a trumpery, stupid, meaningless love-letter. Could any

one believe that a girl on whose education— No, no one could, so it's no use asking the question.'

Having recovered the precious document, Mr. Buddlecombe, after comfortably reseating himself in his armchair, and adjusting his double glasses, addressed himself to its perusal. The effect was apparently most soothing. With the first anticipatory spoonful of the *tortue claire*, grim-visaged war smoothed its wrinkled front, and his brow became as clear as the turtle; and when in fancy he partook of the *saumon*, it might be, but he was not, à la Tartare. There was nothing of the fierce Tartar nature about him then.

While he was thus absorbed the door was noiselessly opened, and, with a mouse-like footfall, Florence entered and ensconced herself behind a large screen, whose duty was to shield the Mayor of Puddleton from the public gaze when he condescended to be mortal, and wished to wash his hands without the trouble of going up-stairs. Of course this clandestine proceeding was the first step towards the fulfilment of Florence's expressed intention of receiving the death-blow on her own devoted little head, should her father make a murderous onslaught with his favourite weapon the poker on the gallant but rash Algernon Warriner.

Florence had only just settled herself in her hiding-place, and Mr. Buddlecombe's spirit had once more gloriously soared to the 'zenith of the cook's efforts,' alias the haunch of venison, when the door was again opened, and Spigot entered with the demeanour of a criminal on his way to the scaffold.

'If you please, your worship, it's not my fault, your most worshipful worship,' faltered Spigot.

'What's not your fault?' said Mr. Buddlecombe, tumbling down

in one moment from the above-mentioned zenith to the very nadir of dismay. 'Spigot, a fearful suspicion flashes through my brain that something has happened to the dinner!'

'O no, nothing quite so fearfully awful as that, your worship.'

The Mayor breathed again.

'I really thought,' he murmured, with that fluttering of spirit, half painful, half joyous, which generally betokens the only half-realised immunity from some suddenly threatened calamity, 'that the cook had had a fit, just at the critical moment when the *congesomay* or the *sooprame de volatile* most needed his delicate attention.'

'It's the young officer, your worship.'

The Mayor started, and in spirit, if not in word, he went as near an oath as a mayor's pure spirit can go.

'He's the most impertinacious creature I ever came across, your worship. He says he must see your worship.'

'Must see me!' burst forth the Mayor. 'Well, upon my word, that's rich! Tell him if he *must* see me he may apply his eye to the bottom of the street-door, and, if the door-mat doesn't interfere with his vision, he may feast his eyes on my evening pumps, which will be just about all he'll catch of me, as I walk across the hall to the dining-room.'

'He, he, he, he!' laughed Spigot for about fifteen seconds, with the regularity of a clock ticking; for Mr. Buddlecombe, who evidently thought this sally rather smart, had given him a glance which unmistakably conveyed the mandate, 'Be tickled.'

When people are very angry there is nothing so soothing, just for a passing moment, as the consciousness of having said a smart, or what they consider a smart,

thing at the expense of the person who has provoked their wrath. Mr. Buddlecombe almost smiled. Spigot was encouraged.

'He's a civil-spoken young gentleman, your worship,' he pleaded, as he instinctively placed his finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket, and tenderly manipulated a sovereign which had recently found its way there, 'a very civil-spoken young gent, and his manners lead one to believe he's moved in polite circles. He begs your worship will be good enough to read this letter.'

'O, all this abominable annoyance will utterly ruin my zest for dinner!' growled Mr. Buddlecombe as he snatched the letter. 'I'll take his letter, but tell him I shall not see him to-night, and not to call here again. My clerk will answer it, if it requires an answer.'

'Very good, your worship.'

And Spigot withdrew, only too glad to have earned his sovereign so easily; for, though he did not approve of soldiers, he was sufficiently a political economist to know that their money was as good as any other people's. He need not have read Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill to have mastered such a fact.

'Now I daresay,' said the Mayor, holding the letter at arm's length and looking suspiciously on it, 'that there's a cracker or a squib inside, warranted to blow the opener's eyes out. That's the military idea of a joke. I wonder,' he continued, as he drew forth his double glasses and adjusted them, 'that I have not received before this a box containing a choice assortment of door-knockers. That, I believe, is the usual military offering to the mayor of a town. Or woke up some morning and found the sign of the Red Lion over my portico.

Another military *jeu de spre*. Or a fine young donkey in my bed, alive and kicking, with Georgina's nightcap on! That is, I believe, the very *cream de la cream* of military *espieglerie*.'

By this time the glasses had been properly adjusted, and the envelope opened.

'Hallo! what's this?' he exclaimed, as, on the very first glance, his eye caught that magic little symbol £, with a good long tail after it. 'Confound that Spigot, running off in such a hurry!'

The bell was rung violently, and in a very few moments Spigot reappeared.

'Don't be in such a hurry, Spigot. This overdone assumption of nimbleness at your time of life is unnatural, not to say ghastly.'

'It is indeed, your worship,' said Spigot humbly, and out of breath.

'Wait outside until I call you in. I may have some message to deliver to this individual.'

The mandate was of course obeyed.

'Now what can this person have to say to me on money matters? At all events, I'll do him the honour of reading his letter.'

"Sir,—Knowing the unfortunate, and on my part deeply deplored, prejudice you entertain towards my profession, I apprehend some difficulty in obtaining an interview with you. I have, therefore, taken the precaution of providing myself with this letter in the event of your refusing in the first instance to see me. The importance of my errand will, I hope, justify what must seem to you an unwarrantable intrusion. It is in my power, sir, to save you no less a sum than £30,000; and how this can be done I am ready to communicate to you at once, if you

will only afford me an opportunity of doing so in private.—I remain, sir, your obedient servant,

“A. F. WARRINER.”

‘Well, a more extraordinary epistle I never read! I do not know whether I should treat it with utter contempt, or afford this person the opportunity he solicits in, I am bound to admit, straightforward and yet respectful terms. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that he has, through relatives or friends, become possessed of certain information regarding some movements in the money market which may affect me to a considerable extent; and being anxious to curry favour with a personage in my exalted position—Anyhow, I'll take a little time to consider what course I shall pursue. In the mean time, however, he may get tired of the doorstep. Spigot!’

‘Your worship,’ said Spigot, promptly reappearing.

‘I may or may not see this gentleman. Request him to wait a little; and in the mean time you may promote him from the doorstep to the library. I'll ring when I want you.’

‘Very good, your worship.’

‘I think I'll see him,’ soliloquised the Mayor, as Spigot closed the door. ‘If it's an outrageous attempt at a hoax, I flatter myself there's enough inborn dignity about me which, with the divinity hedging my office, will cause the attempt to recoil on the offender's own head. But I'm talking nonsense. They would never dare to think of such a thing. To beard a Douglas in his hall! a lion in his den! a mayor in his own private residence! Preposterous! I'll see him.’

Mr. Buddlecombe was just on the point of ringing the bell when his hand was stayed by a horrible

misgiving which then coursed through his brain, gathering strength step by step. ‘I am, and have been for a considerable time, a public character, and of course a fierce light has beaten upon many of my actions. When member for Puddleton I opposed every measure brought forward for the benefit of the army, on the grounds that there should be no army at all. I daresay I have made myself obnoxious to the military. I shouldn't wonder if I've been burnt in effigy on numerous barrack-squares. My efforts may have retarded promotion or something of that kind, and this—this (here his spirit faltered) ‘visit may be prompted by motives of revenge. History repeats itself. Was not the Duke of Buckingham assassinated at Portsmouth by an officer of the army who considered his professional prospects had been blasted by that ill-fated nobleman's policy? Portsmouth begins with a P; so does Puddleton! Buckingham with a B; so does Buddlecombe! Gracious! I may be on the eve of assassination!’

Having brought his analogical argument to this ghastly conclusion, Mr. Buddlecombe was seized with a panic, in which he was very nearly opening the window and invoking the protection of the police. A few moments' consideration, however, induced a more dignified state of mind, and he was about to content himself with ringing the bell and directing his visitor to be shown out, when another glance at the letter made him hesitate.

‘An enormous sum! Quite a fortune! What can it mean?’

Finally greed and curiosity together settled the question, and Mr. Buddlecombe summoned Spigot.

‘Spigot, show the windpipe-slitter in.’

'Who, your worship?'

'The professional brain-spat-  
terer.'

'I beg your most worshipful  
worship's worshipful pardon, but  
I don't quite—'

'You never *do* quite. The  
military individual, of course.  
That's the same thing, isn't it?'

'Certainly, your worship; *exact-*  
*ly* the same thing.'

'And look here, Spigot: inti-  
mate to him in the plainest of  
terms that I have only a very few  
minutes to spare. The dinner  
can be served when ready, and you  
can sound the gong with more  
than usual emphasis; and if that  
has no effect you had better come  
in at intervals of two minutes to  
remind me that the dinner's wait-  
ing.'

'Your wishes shall be scrupu-  
lously attended to, your worship.'

'I should think that would be  
a sufficient hint even to the most  
pachydermatous of military cox-  
combs,' soliloquised Mr. Buddle-  
combe, as Spigot departed on his  
errand. 'I feel I am quite right  
in granting this interview. Never  
throw away a chance, has ever  
been my motto and the key-stone  
of my success in life.'

Here the door was opened, and  
Algernon Warriner was shown in  
by Spigot. Notwithstanding the  
indignity he had been subjected to  
of being kept waiting for fully ten  
minutes on the doorstep, there was  
not the slightest evidence of chagrin  
or impatience about Warriner.  
He was dressed in evening clothes,  
and wore an overcoat, one sleeve  
of which hung down by his side  
empty. Many months before, in  
the Crimea, a fragment of shell  
had struck him on the right fore-  
arm, splintering both bones; and  
it was solely to that glorious  
combination of youth, pluck, and  
a good constitution, that he owed  
the preservation of the limb.

The wound might have healed  
ere this, but Algernon Warriner,  
as brave a youngster as ever wore  
the British uniform, had insisted  
on coming off the sick-list and  
taking his turn of duty in the  
deadly trenches long before he was  
fit to do so.

Many men who have been cool  
under an enemy's fire have found  
that 'interview with papa in the  
study' rather too much for their  
firm nerves. But young Warriner,  
as well as being dauntless in war,  
was daring in love, and, though  
his demeanour was courtesy itself,  
there was an unmistakable air of  
self-possession about him. There  
was one heart, however, in the  
room which was beating hard  
enough for his and itself as well,  
and that was Florence's, as she  
crouched behind the screen. Had  
Warriner been conscious of what  
was on the *other* side of the screen,  
his heart too might have accelerated  
its movement a little.

'I must apologise for intruding  
at such an unseasonable hour,' he  
said, with a polite bow.

'Never mind apologies, sir,' said  
Mr. Buddlecombe, stiffly returning  
the salutation and fussily motion-  
ing his visitor to a seat. 'I have  
a very few moments to spare, and,  
as a saving of time, will dispense  
with apologies and all other pre-  
ambles. I have read your letter,  
and now, sir, I await your expla-  
nation of its extraordinary con-  
tents.'

'To give you that explanation,  
sir, is of course the object of my  
visit,' returned Warriner, with  
great deliberation, but also ex-  
treme politeness. 'The statement  
contained in my letter no doubt  
caused you some surprise. Am I  
not right in supposing so, sir?'

'I have already implied that it  
did, and still does, sir. Pray pro-  
ceed a little quicker, sir.'

Warriner bowed with the great-

est courtesy, as if intimating that Mr. Buddlecombe's wishes on this score should be sacredly observed, and proceeded, with rather more deliberation than before,

'It may also have awakened in your mind, and most naturally so, I am bound to admit, some doubt as to whether I could carry out what I have professed myself able to do.'

'It did, sir. But I have given you the benefit of the doubt and granted you a hearing. Pray now give me the benefit of a little more expedition. My time is precious, sir.'

Here the dinner-gong was sounded by Spigot, according to his instructions, 'with more than usual emphasis.'

'Hooray!' mentally ejaculated Warriner.

'Very precious indeed, sir,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, as the brazen clangour died away; adding, in the silent depths of his heart, 'Why, the clear turtle will be congealing in its receptive tureen, and he hasn't even opened his case.'

'Pray excuse my presence at such an inopportune time, sir,' resumed the polite but terribly prolix visitor. 'The importance of the business on hand will, I feel sure, plead in my behalf, especially when I add my own expressions of regret that circumstances should have forced me into obtruding myself—'

'I've told you before, sir,' interrupted Mr. Buddlecombe, with a warmth of tone that brought Florence's little face peeping round the edge of the screen, with considerable alarm portrayed in it, 'I have told you before, sir, that apologies are only a waste of time. Now to the point. You say it is in your power to save me a very large sum of money. Out with it, sir, without any further beating about the bush.'

'Knowing how much more experience you must possess than I do, sir, in monetary as well as in most other mundane matters, and also having in view the difference in our ages, I feel it is the height of presumption on my part—'

'O dear, O dear, I wonder what the *congsomay* is *congsomaying* itself into!' muttered Mr. Buddlecombe, with a stifled groan, as he rose from his chair and took a turn up and down the room.

'—To remind you of the trite old proverb, "More haste, less speed." This is true in most—'

'Mr. Bolitho and Mrs. Buddlecombe are in the drawing-room, your worship, and the dinner's waiting,' said Spigot, throwing open the door and speaking as impressively as he could.

'That's capital; he can't stand the strain much longer,' mentally remarked Warriner, with an internal chuckle.

'There, sir, do you hear that?' said Mr. Buddlecombe, as Spigot closed the door and retired. 'I'll really trouble you for a little more *saumon à la Tar*— Dear, dear, I mean a little more expedition, sir. Surely you are not so morally blind as to wilfully keep a gentleman from his dinner.'

'Certainly not, sir,' replied Warriner, again courteously inclining his head, and speaking in more measured tones than ever. 'But still you will forgive me, I am sure, if I hint that, weighed with the importance of my business, a dinner should be as mere dust in the balance.'

'Nothing of the sort, sir,' snapped Mr. Buddlecombe, wheeling fiercely round on his visitor. 'I don't agree with you, sir;' and turning on his heel, he muttered with indignation, 'He's never seen me eat a dinner, or he wouldn't go calling it mere dust in

the balance, the long-winded young puppy.'

'Well, sir, we will at once proceed to business, then. Will you allow me to consult my note-book for a few moments?'

In reply to this unreasonable and unseasonable request, Mr. Buddlecombe could only wave his hand and give vent to a nondescript noise which may or may not have been the permission solicited. Anyhow, Warriner interpreted it in the former sense; and while he was apparently absorbed in his notes, Mr. Buddlecombe paced up and down the room, venting his sorrow, his indignation, and his impatience in the following disjointed mutterings:

'Sooprême de volatile aux trois-fus ruined! Filets de pigeon done to rags! Chaponг rôtee au Périgord must be rapidly becoming chaponг rôtee au kitchen cinder. I shall have a sort of rag and cinder banquet.'

Here Spigot appeared, and piled up the agony still higher with:

'The French cook, your worship, says the sight of his dinner spoiling before his very eye is getting too much for his feelings.'

'O, flesh and blood can stand this no longer!' said the mayor, in a desperate aside; and then added aloud, 'There, sir, you hear that. You've been quite long enough consulting your note-book. I can't waste another moment over preliminaries. State your case at once.'

'What a lot of playing the old gentleman takes! A salmon is a joke to him,' thought Warriner. 'Ten thousand pardons,' he pleaded, with another of his extremely polite bows. 'Believe me, I feel the delicacy of my position most acutely, and I must really beg to be allowed once more to tender my sincerest apol—'

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr.

Buddlecombe wildly, 'politeness is all very well—I myself always carry it to an absurd extreme; but we have had enough of it on this occasion, sir. I'm sick of it. For goodness' sake let's have a little plain speaking now.'

'Certainly, sir, I quite admit the justice of your remarks; and you, on your side, will, I am sure, enter into my feelings of embarrassment—'

'No, sir, I can't do anything of the sort.'

'Pray, sir, do not hurry me; it is a subject involving so much—'

'Waste of time, sir!' roared Mr. Buddlecombe, now losing all control over himself. 'O, I see through all this delay and shilly-shallying. It is merely the vain expedient to gain time on the part of a—a—an impostor, sir, an impostor!'

Here Mr. Buddlecombe, red in the face with passion, snapped his fingers at Warriner and pointed indignantly to the door.

'There, sir, there's your way. Be off with you!'

The imperturbable Warriner rose slowly from his seat, bowed low, and moved towards the door. On reaching it, he turned round and quietly said,

'It is in sorrow, sir, rather than in anger or indignation, that I repudiate the charge of imposition. If you cannot enter into *my* feelings, I can into *yours*, knowing as I do how strong appearances must be against me. But I can only reiterate, on my word of honour—' this solemnly placing his hand on his heart—' that the matter I had to lay before you would have involved a saving to you of the large sum I mentioned in my letter.'

'The dinner will be utterly spoilt, your worship,' said Spigot, putting his head in at the door.

Mr. Buddlecombe manifested

great emotion ; and Warriner continued, in that style of periphrastic politeness which he had adopted all through the interview, for the purpose of spinning out the time :

' I feel that I have already transgressed the limits of politeness beyond all rules of etiquette. Good-evening, sir.'

Poor Mr. Buddlecombe, torn by conflicting emotions, was a pitiable spectacle.

' Good-eve—stay, sir, don't—dear me—utterly spoiled ! Thirty thousand *filets de pigeons* sterling. I can't see any other way out of the difficulty. O dear, O dear ! Hang it, sir ! give me the pleasure' (gulp) ' of your company at dinner, and you can impart this piece of information in your own way afterwards.'

' Delighted,' said Warriner pleasantly. ' Since you're so pressing, I shall have much pleasure.'

' Humph,' grunted Mr. Buddlecombe aside, "since you're so pressing," as the paving-stone remarked to the steam-roller. Spigot !'

' Your worship,' said Spigot, promptly reappearing from outside.

' Relieve this gentleman of his hat and coat ; and, Spigot, lay another place at the table ; he will dine here.'

As Mr. Buddlecombe made this

last communication, the situations between master and man were, for the first time in their respective lives, reversed. Spigot fairly stared his master out of countenance, and Mr. Buddlecombe dared not meet the searching gaze of his servant.

' I beg your most worshipful worship's pardon,' at last stammered Spigot ; ' but I don't think I quite heard what your worship was pleased to say.'

' He will dine here ; take his hat and coat,' sharply repeated Mr. Buddlecombe.

Like one in a dream, Spigot obeyed the behest ; and then, with a sort of savage politeness, Mr. Buddlecombe bowed his guest out of the room and followed.

As soon as the coast was clear, Florence emerged from behind the screen.

' O Algy, Algy ! ' she exclaimed, clapping her hands and laughing merrily, ' you clever darling ! I love you more than ever now, for your tact and coolness. But what can the scheme be ? Algy has given his word of honour, so of course there must be something. O poor darling old papa ! Now I must run up, and then go into the drawing-room as if I had just come down from my room.'

(To be continued.)

## AN APRIL DREAM.

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THE sun was sinking low in the west—  
Low in the west at the close of day ;  
And the opal clouds, in splendour drest,  
Shone crimson and amber and silver-gray ;  
And the twilight lay, like a veil of white,  
On the face of day, at the door of night.

The spirit of Spring touched all the trees,  
And the leaves broke out as they felt her pass ;  
Her voice was heard in the balmy breeze,  
And her ankles twinkled in the grass ;  
The buttercup sought to kiss her feet,  
As she trod the daisy-lighted street.

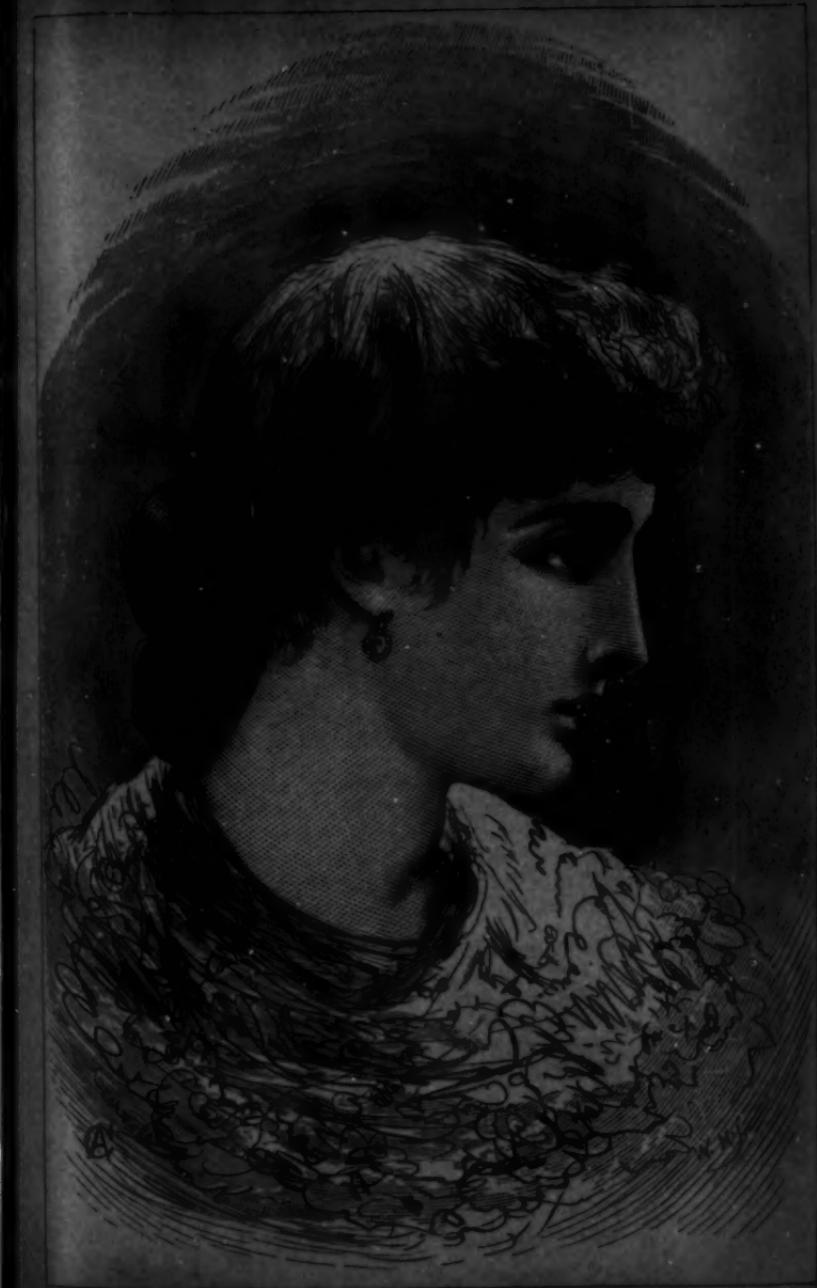
The fragrant breath of the violets blew  
On my face like a pleasant dream of rest.  
O, the world was fair, and the world was true !—  
And the sun was sinking low in the west ;  
And the twilight hung like a pall of white  
On the wraith of day, at the grave of night.

And over the violet-scented sod,  
Through purple beds, in the purple shade,  
The maiden I love beside me trod,  
And fair was the face of my lily-maid ;  
And the tender light of her violet eyes  
Dispelled the shadows that filled the skies.

We spoke no word, for the solemn hush  
Of the evening lay on my soul and hers ;  
But we heard the song of a missel-thrush  
That sang with his mate in a belt of firs ;  
And I knew that my heart, though unawares,  
Was singing a sweeter song than theirs.

But the shadows grew, and the night came on,  
And with it the hour of parting came ;  
The daylight died when my love had gone,  
But the lovelight burnt with brighter flame ;  
The shadow of grief was in my breast,—  
And the sun was sinking low in the west.

O sweet fair face that I love so well,  
O beautiful face that no more I see,  
Must I lose the love that I could not tell,  
And mourn for the hopes that die with thee ?  
Hast thou gone from my life like leaves that fall ?  
Wert thou only a dream, then, after all ?



AN APRIL DREAM.

See the Form.

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## THE VIOLIN-PLAYER.

BY BERTHA THOMAS, AUTHOR OF 'PROUD MAISIE.'

### CHAPTER XI.

#### A VENETIAN INTERLUDE.

NIGHT at Venice. Summer night—the air transparent as ether, and sweet with the perfume of gardenias and jasmine, little bouquets of which, in basketfuls, are being hawked about by ragged, dark-eyed urchins among the crowd of idlers sipping coffee and ices in the gardens of the Royal Palace, and listening to the strains of *Semiramide* and *Aida* played by the band under the trees.

Nine o'clock, and the music ceases; the throng disperse. Venice, never more than half-asleep, is sinking into the nearest approach to rest she knows. The fisher-boats have come into port on the Riva dei Schiavoni, and crowd there in dark masses, their red sails—that seem to have caught the tint of the campanili—furled, whilst along the landing long black rows of gondolas lie waiting for hire, the gondoliers dozing on the marble stairs.

Two young people stood looking down on this scene from the balconies of the Hôtel Danieli. The open windows behind showed a vista of the long lofty *salon* of the grandest but dullest-looking suite in that grand but dull ex-palazzo of the Mocenigo.

It was very dull just then. July is a month when the English (wherein they err) do not frequent Venice, and the best rooms at the Hôtel Danieli, and the undivided obsequiousness of the landlord and his staff, are at the

disposal of the English *milor* and his lady, who have made it their halting-place on their way to the Tyrol. The *milor* is not a *milor*; it is a figure of speech which he cannot get these Italians to drop. There is that about him which secures an overplus of attention from discerning subordinates. Hundreds of rich consequential Britons came and went, without meeting with a tithe of the respectful oblations everywhere showered on this mild, unpretentious, middle-aged, bald-headed gentleman and his young wife.

Lady Brereton's face, as she stood on the balcony, was scarcely visible in the dusk; but the clinging folds of her ivory-coloured Indian-silk dress set off a figure that went as near the perfection of grace as imperfect human nature can go. The sleeping Ariadne in the Vatican has not more exquisite curves, a more consummately beautiful outline. Her companion was not Sir Adolphus, but a young man with penetrating gray eyes, and brown hair like her own; the two heads nearly match as he bends forward to speak. She smiles back with animation; and an impulsive Frenchman, passing underneath, looks up admiringly, and remarks to his fellow, '*C'est Romeo et Juliette!*'

Romeo was telling Juliet an anecdote. Whether he had it on good authority, as he averred, or whether he had invented it, or improved it, or picked it up in the gossip columns of a newspaper, was immaterial.

'It seems,' he was saying, 'that just now all artistic society in Rome is talking about some new statue by some new man—a figure of Paris on Mount Ida. The other day an American millionaire—the present owner of that famous statue "Jerusalem"—walks in upon the artist, whose name, I think, is Romer.'

Lady Brereton looked up with a sudden curious gleam of interest.

'The millionaire announces himself: he is ready to purchase the artist's work on the artist's own terms. The young man is delighted; the matter arranged; and the customer is leaving the studio, when he turns and explains himself thus: "These ten years, sir, I've been ransacking Europe for a companion-city to my "Jerusalem," and your fine personification of the French capital is the first I've turned up!"'

Lady Brereton seemed highly diverted.

'How amusing you are!' she said. 'You have made me laugh for the first time since we came to Venice.'

'It is a dull place,' said Gervase feelingly.

'It will always remind me,' she resumed, 'of our wedding journey, seven years ago now. It was the first place in Italy that Adolphus took me to.'

Gervase was silent, presumably sympathetic past the power of speech. Then he remarked suddenly,

'I should never bring my bride to Venice.'

'Why not?'

'There is too much here to admire. I should be jealous.'

'Jealous of St. Mark, and Titian?'

'Yea, and of the Rialto, and the Bridge of Sighs, and the Grand Canal—of anything that drew away her attention from myself.'

But perhaps other men may not be so exacting, and some may have nothing to fear from any rival, even Venice.'

'O, but I really enjoyed it then,' she said presently, 'and was never tired of going about to the sights and so on. But now I know them all so well, I confess Venice to me is like a sea-prison or a grave; and I am glad we are leaving the day after to-morrow.'

'It is my first visit,' said Gervase apologetically. The chimes of St. Mark sounded as he spoke, and he made a polite movement of surprise, as though to suggest that, under the charm of present society, he had forgotten all about time and the hour. 'Nine o'clock. Your husband has evidently been detained; I must take my chance of getting a word with him at the ball to-night.'

'Must you go already?' said Diana, with a little prospective yawn. 'He is sure, you know, O, quite sure, to come in soon.'

Gervase half smiled, but shook his head, and excused himself.

'You are going to the opera, I daresay,' she said. 'Is it a Visconti night? I heard her last year at Milan; but they say her voice is very much gone off. Is it true?'

'I see no difference,' said Gervase unconcernedly.

'Ah, but you are one of her special admirers, are you not?' she said, unconcernedly also.

'There's no opera at all this evening, I believe,' he replied. 'By the way, do you go to the concert at the Fenice to-morrow?'

'Yes, yes; and remember we count upon you. Nothing in the world bores Adolphus so much as music. He victimizes himself for my sake; but it always sends him to sleep—which is hard upon me, you know.'

No sooner had the door closed on the *attaché* than the light

and smile vanished from Diana's countenance, thrown off like a tiresome piece of armour. Crossing the room, she met her own likeness in an antique gilt mirror, and stopped to glance at it as sharply as if it were a rival's.

' Still so young-looking ! ' she thought, with surprise. At that moment she could have sworn that she felt a hundred. So much was certain, that in her image she found no cause for discontent. She turned away restlessly. Diana had not faith enough in happiness to wish anything keenly. All that the world had to offer in that way was empty as wind. Only she was speculating if the south wind might have been rather better than the north.

' Poor Gervase ! '

Even to herself she kept up the farce of pitying him, as it were in revenge. Her thoughts now flew back a hundred years—seven in the calendar. Gervase had made love to her, wanted to marry her presumably, and she—flint-hearted though she prided herself on being at seventeen—had come perilously near requiting an imaginary predilection. Accident had undeviated her. Sir Adolphus had carried off the proud piqued maiden, and her heart, from want of practice, had grown very nearly as stony as she would have had it. Gervase had never touched it since then, or come near it ; and if just now she questions whether after all she took a false step in her choice, it is not from motives of sentiment. Gervase was clever, ambitious, bold, was likely to rise; whilst—

The comparison was cut short, or rather completed, by the entrance of Sir Adolphus, who with all his virtues had just this much against him, that he was setting, indisputably setting.

He was a little surprised to find

his wife in a brown study, and not yet dressed for the *bal de cérémonie* to which he was to take her.

' There will always be time enough,' she said mechanically, as she left the room to put on her ball-dress and jewels.

Sir Adolphus was concerned at the faint depression he detected in her manner, but consoled himself by the reflection that social distraction never failed to restore her to spirits. So he settled down in an armchair with a political pamphlet, which in an unguarded moment he had promised the author to read, and fell asleep over the second page.

Gervase left the hotel with a more animated step than that with which he had entered it. At his approach the gondoliers roused themselves, and doffed their caps. He stepped into a boat he had left waiting there, involuntarily glancing upwards to see if Diana were regarding him from the balcony. No such thing ; she was regarding herself in the glass.

At half a word and half a gesture from him, the rowers started off. How soothing, how grateful, both to the flesh and the spirit is the Venetian mode of locomotion ! No straining horses, no stupid drivers and jolting, and no noise, except an occasional outbreak of swearing at the bridges, when Greek meets Greek ; but the war is of words only—no fear of the faintest literal concussion, for gondoliers have made rowing one of the fine arts. You are wafted on, as smoothly as if at a wish, to your destination, and however you may be in a hurry to get there, you are sorry to arrive.

Gervase was never in a hurry, or he would have been now. Presently he took out a small note, and tried to re-read a rather illegible scrawl by starlight.

'Casa Malatesta, 1<sup>o</sup> piano.

'We are going a party to the Lido to-night. Will you make one? We go masked, but you come as you like. Join us here any time before ten.'

The gondola had left the Grand Canal, and was darting through the labyrinthine network of smaller streams. Suddenly it halted on the quay of a narrow water-lane, in the unfrequented Giudecca quarter, where, though but a stone's throw from the busy brilliant Grand Canal, all is lonely, dark, and silent. The head-gondolier pointed to a large, walled-up-looking house, saying, 'Casa Malatesta.'

Gervase sprang out, pushed open the heavy wooden door, and disappeared. The door swung to, and the gondoliers dozed off again.

The hall within was unlit, except by a gleam from a broken gas-lamp in a grass-grown courtyard beyond. Gervase mounted the stone staircase to the first floor, and rang.

The head of Virginie, Linda's watchful attendant, will appear at the grating above, and shout with Italian precaution, 'Who is it?'

Gervase is prepared with a *bon mot* to fling back in reply.

There was a moment's delay, and the door swung open. Gervase marched in, and it slammed behind him.

He was in the vestibule of Mdlle. Visconti's apartments, but no Virginie was visible. The place was faintly lit by Roman lamps, and the pleasant odour of some rare Oriental perfume filled the atmosphere. Evidently a surprise awaited the intruder. Linda was always surprising her friends.

The door of her little *salon* was ajar. He pushed it open gently, and entered.

At the first glance Gervase

asked himself if he had not lost his way, and walked into one of the private apartments of the Moor's Alhambra. The furniture was overlaid with Turkish stuffs; richly-coloured and delicately-worked drapery disguised the hardness and sharp outlines of Italian chairs and sofas. On the couch, among red, yellow, and green silk-embroidered cushions, Mdlle. Visconti was reclining, with a palm-fern and a vase full of roses becomingly placed at the head of her divan. She wore a loose Turkish dress of blue silk and white gauze, and pretended to be sunk in a siesta.

'Bravo, bravo!' said Gervase, tapping his hands together gently.

She did not stir. He went up softly behind her, and, bending down over the green cushion on which her head was resting, looked into her face. It seemed to Linda that one of the rose-leaves had fluttered down and touched her cheek.

Her mouth broke into a roguish smile; the blue eyes opened and met his; and the spell was broken. She sprang up, and laughed heartily; Gervase also.

'What's the meaning of this?' he said. 'I see the Grand Turk has been here—taken Mdlle. Visconti for a Circassian—she's like one, I vow—and offered to promote her to be chief houri of his earthly paradise.'

'His what?'

'His harem, in the vernacular.'

Linda put her hand up to his mouth in playful reproach.

'Ask Cucusus our manager, and Tebaldo our madcap tenor,' she said ruefully. 'They are always up to some nonsense or other. The latest is that they have taken it into their heads we shall all go to the Lido to-night in Eastern disguise; the men as pashas, with their faces darkened; the ladies

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veiled of course. We are to pass for a legation from the Emperor of Morocco, and shall mystify the Cook's tourists and New Yorkers nicely. Won't you come? We have room for one European *attaché*.'

Gervase laughed, and declined. He was engaged, he said; but to make himself amends had come to present his excuses in person.

Linda seemed content with the compromise. She stood up, and turned a rather unsuccessful pirouette or two, saying,

'What do you think of me for a Nautch-girl? Virginie and I have been ransacking Venice all day for Eastern stuffs. We are coming back here to supper, and I wanted the room to look in character. Look at this absurd little inlaid mother-o'-pearl table. Here's coffee all ready for you, Monsieur le Sultan.'

'I can't see,' said Gervase plaintively. 'Do, for heaven's sake, tell Virginie to bring in an ordinary civilised moderator-lamp or something, that I may look at the Sultana.'

The Nautch-girl took a taper, went round and lit the candles herself. Linda was at this time in the absolute prime of her beauty. There is a supreme moment that comes to a peach, a pear, an anemone flower, a fair woman—a point passed, alas, almost as soon as reached.

It was easy to see that nothing as yet had succeeded in materially interfering with her enjoyment of enjoyable things. She had always contrived to throw off or make light of trouble in all its forms; and the fret and corrosion of theatrical life, if it had told secretly, had not as yet told outwardly upon her. Perhaps she was really the loveliest woman in Venice at that moment, as she was undoubtedly the most courted and talked about.

'Well, what news?' began Gervase, shaking his head over Linda's coffee. 'Virginie is not equal to Florian,' he parenthesised silently.

'Faust last night, and a triumph for me,' said Linda, with gay self-approval. 'Why were you not there to see it?'

'Because, for my sins, I suppose, I was dining with the representative of my nation.'

'What, those English, those Breretons?'

'How many times, I wonder, shall I have to explain to you that Sir Adolphus Brereton is no more an ambassador than—'

'Than I am a sister of mercy,' suggested Linda.

'Exactly; a simple *rentier*,' concluded Gervase, deeming it vain to perplex Linda's understanding with the ups and downs of that gentleman's past career in the diplomatic service, from which ill-health had caused him to retire two years ago.

'What is his wife's name?' asked Linda abruptly. Then, as Gervase was looking displeased, she added playfully, 'Only answer me that, *caro mio*, and I'll never allude to her again.'

'Diana.'

'That means the moon, I know. A good name for your cousin. She's cold as steel. I saw her at St. Mark's on the procession day, with that stick of a man she has married. He looks like an umbrella-stand with a coat and hat hung upon it.'

'Let them alone, for heaven's sake!' said Gervase, impatiently and in despair.

'I will, I will,' said Linda, aware that the style of her conversation irritated him; but prudence was the instinct most easily overcome in her. 'It is nonsense, is it not, for me to be jealous of fashionable English people like your friends?'

' Ridiculous nonsense,' said Gervase frankly.

' And yet I could be,' said Linda musingly. ' I am jealous of anybody who tries to attract what I care for away from me. I hate them—should like to kill them !'

' Child ! little fool !' said Gervase laughingly.

' O, I should ;' and she came and sat on a low seat beside him. ' Tell me now, did you think of Linda singing at the opera, when you were over your ambassador's wine ?'

' I did.'

' And wished yourself in the stalls ?'

' Of course. Still you know very well, Linda, that you cannot play Marguerite.'

' Now why ?' she said ; adding insinuatingly, ' You must know I never allowed any one to find fault with me before.'

' Because Linda is a coquette to the tips of her fingers. Such a Marguerite would have begun to flirt with Mephistopheles directly Faust's back was turned.'

She laughed outright, accepting the comment as a compliment.

' Bah, I play it as I can. Anyhow it is better than Mdlle. Zagarola's ; a prim hypocritical little minx, with a pursed-up mouth turned down at the corners, and flourishing a big prayer-book ; for all the world like the Fille de Madame Angot in the first act.'

Gervase laughed heartily.

' Say that mine is better, or say that you like it better—that is all I want.'

Gervase said it obediently.

He was going to say something else ; Linda checked him, asking abruptly, with sudden coolness,

' Well, *caro mio*, and when are you leaving Venice ?'

' My friends start the day after to-morrow for the Tyrol ; they wish me to join them by and by.'

' And you wish to go. For your cousin's sake or your own ?'

Gervase continued, without heeding the interruption :

' In October, as you know, I am due at Rome, to replace a comrade at the Embassy.'

' October,' she repeated musingly. ' By then I shall be in Cairo, or New York, or—married—who knows ?'

' What do you mean, please ?' he demanded.

' Just what I say. You know old Count Janowski here, he is madder after me than ever. He would marry me to-morrow if I would listen.'

Gervase laughed.

' Linda—Mdlle. Visconti, what a conquest to boast of ! Think of the splendid establishment he offers you. A husband of sixty, ruined by roulette, a martyr to rheumatism—'

' Ah, but to be a countess !' she interposed.

' To be a *diva* is better, believe me,' said Gervase frankly. ' What do you know about countesses ? Besides, you would only be a countess of smoke.'

' So I thought ; so I think ; only there come times—'

' Now, for instance ?' said Gervase inquiringly.

' Not now.' She gave it up, bent down her head over his hand, which she held, and suddenly began kissing it in a passionate little way. ' That is if I could think that you—'

' That I ?'

' Speak the truth when you say that you love me.'

' *Petite*,' he said gravely, ' what must I do to convince you ?'

She was silent ; then lifted her head with the look of *diablerie* of a spoilt child.

' Say you won't go to the Tyrol.'

What his answer would have been is not known. A ring at

the door awoke Linda to the fact that she was expecting a party of friends ; and Gervase recollect ed that he was going to a ball.

' Shall you be at the Fenice tomorrow ? ' she asked, detaining him a moment. ' You remember the child who used to live with me at Bleiburg. She's to play, you know. She's Araci el's pupil. Have you forgotten her ? '

Gervase reflected.

' No ; but I've forgotten her name.'

' Laurence Therval. She's grown up now, and a splendid player everybody says.'

' Indeed ! ' said Gervase, making a note of the news, as a bit of musical gossip, wherewithal to regale Lady Brereton—an accomplished amateur—at the ball.

Linda's friends now broke in upon them, ready and primed for the frolic ; and Gervase departed, leaving behind him a merry party, inclined to be wild. Yet it is a question whether there was most reckless disorder in their buffoonery, or in his head, as he joined the decorous assembly, talked business with Sir Adolphus, and waltzed punctually with his wife.

Of all the pretty adventures that had befallen our hero between twenty and thirty—and if, by thirty, he had come to regard this world as a pleasure-ground designed by the Almighty for the special satisfaction of Gervase Damian, he had some excuse in his uniformly flattering experience—not the least interesting was his unexpected meeting at Milan, a month ago, with Linda Visconti.

How had things changed since they parted ! Gervase—so the outside world told him—was on the high-road to eminence in the diplomatic service. Linda—no doubt of that—was well launched, both on the operatic stage and the stage of life. But except

that her beauty was more brilliant and complete than formerly, she seemed unaltered ; attractive as ever, unaccountable as ever, and if as indiscreet, she was clever enough to command the appearances of respect, even where she could command no more.

Both of them had a character for volatility among their friends of the opposite sex, and knew it. Who would have predicted that, after an interval of years, they should have been able to take up their acquaintance where it had been dropped ? Not they themselves. There was something piquant in this presence of the strange element of constancy in a *rapport* so ephemeral as theirs—something that added not a little to the charm.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### GALA NIGHT.

THE opening of the Fenice Theatre, even for a night, and whatever the occasion, is always a gala event in Venice. Had Araci el's concert come off under any other roof, Venetia's Upper Ten might simply have ignored it. The artist was an old stager, and well aware that if he wished to move that little world he must first get the right place to stand upon. Interest with the powers that be had thrown open those magic doors to him and his company.

It was a *festa* too ; the anniversary of a battle, or a peace, or the translation of a saint's bones—what matter ! something that made a pretext for illuminations and fireworks. The interior of the Fenice presented a gay picture. Italian ladies in full dress thronged the boxes, affording foreign tourists a rare glimpse of the famed native beauty they have mostly to take upon trust. Rather too much

powder and rouge, perplexing to a neophyte unpractised in distinguishing the duchess from the *ballerina* she tries to counterfeit; but beautiful eyes, beautiful shoulders, beautiful jewels were there in profusion; and the raw material for beautiful dresses, sadly marred, however, in the making-up; for French fashions, like the French language, come to dire grief under Italian treatment.

Linda was conspicuous in a small stage-box, though half en-sconced behind the curtain, a manœuvre that led to much painful twisting of necks and straining of eyes on the part of young gentlemen in the pit, tantalised by a glimpse of the twinkle of a diamond earring and the back of a golden head.

But the centre of attraction was in the best box on the best tier, which Sir Adolphus Brereton had taken for his party. Diana had the gift of appropriating everybody's notice without a touch in look, dress, or manner seeming to solicit it. Her husband, a patient fixture in the background, was generally overlooked; but Gervase, in attendance on his cousin, was the object of envying glances from his own sex, and admiring ones from hers, in about equal proportion.

Well might the compliment of so brilliant a house put the artists on their mettle; and now for a feast of sound, beginning with Rossini and ending with Weber.

Titian is dead and Tintoret is dead; and men have it that their art is on the wane. But the spirit that inspired these men is indestructible. Spent or stopped in one line of expression, it breaks out in another. We are in the nineteenth century, and Music is having her day.

Titian and Tintoret never heard *Don Giovanni* or *Fidelio*, a Beet-

oven symphony or a Schumann song. Music, in the Golden Age of her elder sister, was in leading-strings, stiff, formal, and monotonous as the Madonnas of the early Byzantine painters. Many a modern pianoforte exercise strikes as a work of genius compared with the best operas and cantatas that Raphael or Michael Angelo ever knew.

Aracié had taken care to make his musical *menu* as 'light' as possible. Italy, the cradle of music, remains in some sense its cradle only. Other nations have adopted her child; it has grown into a giant, and she shrinks appalled from its exploits. The Señor was an established favourite with the Venetians, and his famous execution of stupendously difficult variations on a popular theme tickled their ears, gratified their love of the marvellous, and won him his accustomed applause. But the novelty, and therefore the main interest, of the concert to most present was the wonderful violin-player, Laurence Therval, personally unknown in Italy, though not to fame there. Her name in crossing the Alps had contracted the usual halo of fable that follows notoriety about like a shadow.

'Quite young—sixteen or seventeen at most,' said a gentleman who took in one local 'Leaf.'

'Nonsense! Six or seven and twenty if she's a day,' returned his companion, who took in its rival; adding mysteriously, 'You know she's *really* a daughter of Aracié's, mother a lady of high rank—secret marriage—an old story now,' with a nod and a look that meant a whole sensation novel.

'Moonsbine!' said a third, who read *Galignani*. 'Her father was English, a soap-merchant who went bankrupt and shot himself, and her real name is Romer.'

'Chut! she comes.'

The gentlemen hushed their gossip, the ladies stopped criticising each other's toilettes, and opera-glasses were levelled with the unanimity of a regiment presenting arms.

The next minute the comments in the stalls began again.

'They said she was pretty. O no, she's too thin; and she's got no colour at all. She should rouge, then ;' and so on, with that amazing, semi-brutal Italian candour that passes judgment in an Arcadian manner on all orders and degrees of women.

'Beautiful eyes, though,' said one who had long sight.

'Yes; but hazel, or some mixed colour, or they would not sparkle so from so far off.'

'She is like one of the immortal Vinci's pictures!' exclaimed an enthusiastic art-student in the gallery, and he felt his heart gone on the spot. He could have set the bells ringing; he had found a heroine for his next picture.

Thin, but not fragile or shadowy, her figure was firmly built and well outlined. The beauty of the face was chiefly one of spirit, expression, and intelligence. It charmed like beauty, and set you searching to account for your admiration. Dark hair, pushed back from a white forehead; a pale face,—paler under the glare of the foot-lights and the stress of excitement,—a face that, with its firm-set lips and intense fixity of expression, might have been cut out of alabaster. Her dress, which the English party approved—'In excellent taste, so rare in that sort of people,' said Lady Brereton (whilst the enraptured art-student in the gallery at once set her down, with her black tulle and silk, and silver ornaments, for a princess of night)—displeased the Italians highly. Black, to this sunny folk, is an ugly, de-

pressing colour, a colour for nuns and funerals. To crown all, the young performer's simplicity of manner went against her. They were not at all fastidious, those gentlemen in the stalls—had a frank liking for nods and becks and wreathed smiles, and would always rather pay to see a Bacchante than a St. Cecilia.

Their cold glances, dead silence, and evident disapproval had offered a challenge. Such a public gives no quarter, knows no mercy; and her friends behind the scenes felt it, and looked at each other with anxiety as Laurence undaunted picked up the glove.

The Hungarian airs which Araciell had chosen for her to play were too fantastic to appeal to that crowd. Venice is passionate, not romantic; realistic, not imaginative. That Laurence should make that music please those men was, in a technical sense, impossible. But frown and shrug though they might, they soon found they must look and listen too.

As one after another of those wild stirring airs followed, the veriest Gallios present that night found the music they deprecated affect them strangely, keenly, delightfully; it set the lover thinking of his love, woke fancies in the artist, soothed the discontented, elated the light-hearted. Some essence went abroad as she played that heightened the joyousness of life and idealised its sadness. Such is the mysterious alchemy of music, which, falling on barren and desolated hearts, can make fresh thoughts, fresh feelings grow.

To come down from the clouds, those would-be detractors were men, with heads, hearts, pulses, feelings, intelligence; and genius has a pass-key to all natures.

Once conquered, an Italian au-

dience is generosity itself. Vociiferous calls and recalls and deafening acclamations followed now.

Lady Brereton tapped her fan lightly on the ledge of her box, saying,

'A very clever performance.'

Her tone grated on Gervase. It is true a minute before he had been speaking of Araciels playing as he might of the tricks of a clever poodle. For though theoretically he did not dislike or even despise fiddlers, and piqued himself on being so much more liberal-minded than Lord Chesterfield, he felt a gap between himself and such, that made on the whole even his tailor seem more like a man and a brother. Only here the violinist was a woman, and it had never occurred to him to lose sight of the link of humanity between them.

From that moment nothing but Laurence was spoken or thought of in the theatre. Twice more she played—a duet with Araciels, and a solo. The rest of the programme was comparatively unheeded. Venice was won.

Among the beholders not the least interested was Mdlle. Linda Visconti. Although about as tenacious of most impressions as a sieve, her little comrade's affection had been so unlike anything else that had come into her life, that those old memories had still a lingering hold on her feelings, and she was surprised by a moment of unaffected, unselfish gratification in Laurence's triumph over the Venetians. The child had wonderfully improved; her playing, Linda affirmed, was magnificent. But what delighted her chiefly was the contrast between the little boyish figure, with short elf-locks, that she recollects, and this tall maiden, with long trailing robe and thick coils of hair. The transformation, said Miss Linda

to her professional friends in her box, as she told them the story, was really too killing.

It was Laurence's turn to be amazed when, after the concert, a beauty in ruby-coloured velvet came rushing to meet her behind the scenes, took hold of both her hands, and embraced her effusively, saying, loud enough for every one to hear,

'You were superb; I am delighted to be here to tell you so! and she must recognise her fellow-student of seven years ago.

'I heard you were in Venice,' Laurence replied hurriedly, overjoyed at the meeting. 'It seemed too good to be true. May I come and see you? We leave to-morrow night.'

'Yes—no,' Linda said vaguely. 'Where are you staying?'

'Hôtel Vittoria.'

'Then I will come to you to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock. I am not settled myself. It will be better I come to you. And now we are all going on the water to see the illuminations. *Au revoir.* Mind, to-morrow at twelve.'

And she vanished with a suite of theatrical satellites—like a brilliant comet with its tail.

Araciels, on his side, was being beset by a swarm of professional friends pressing him and his wife and their ward to join this, that, or the other party for the last hours of that gala night. He put them all off, saying,

'No, no; we go first home. I have two children to fetch; we are a gondola full ourselves. Come, my soul' (to his wife). 'Renza, where are you? You will always be getting lost.'

It was Araciels who was always straying away from his flock, conscientiously believing the sheep to be at fault. Before he could be stopped he was running all round the porticoes of the theatre

in search of his gondola. Meanwhile, Laurence had quickly singled it out from the rest, but the recapture of Araciël was a matter of time. A friend was sent in pursuit, and brought him back at last.

Ah, there was the gondola ! he said complacently. He knew he should find it ; but ladies are always so impatient.

The trio shot off in the starlight. Araciël gave a long sigh of relief ; his task was done ; he was now going to enjoy himself. He feasted his eyes on the bridges, palaces, and towers, and presently sang out aloud, at the top of a voice as hoarse as a raven's :

“ Sur sa mer nonchalante,  
Vénise l'indolente,  
Ne compte ni ses jours—”

‘ Mercy, Araciël !’ begged his wife, with her hands to her ears.

‘ May I not sing, my soul ? You forbid it in the house, and I obey ; but I thought out of doors— This place makes me fizz with admiration ; then what can I do but sing ? One cannot dance in a gondola :

“ Ne compte ni ses jours,  
Ni ses amours.”

Eh, Renza,’ suddenly interrupting himself, ‘ how, pray, did you ever get acquainted with *la Visconti* ?

‘ We were students together at Bleiburg.’

‘ To be sure. Who could believe it ! Madonna mia ! she has got on in this world since then !

‘ Her dress was magnificent,’ sighed his wife. ‘ She wore her hair à *la Dubarry*, Renza ; did you observe ?

‘ And the jewels, did you observe ?’ put in Araciël. ‘ Who provides them ? The theatre director, I suppose.’

‘ Hush, thou slanderer ! rebuked his wife.

‘ But I say nothing, heart of

mine ! Here they call her the Queen of the Adriatic. She has made a *furore* ; but her voice is already spoilt, and her singing shocking. She has been pushed by intrigue and private interest.’

‘ I don’t believe it,’ said Laurence impulsively.

‘ Ah, the Hôtel Vittoria at last !’ said Araciël, who was fidgetting to get to the *festa*. ‘ Poor little Cherubina and Domenico ! —eating their heads off with impatience, I daresay.’

‘ Ah, *mon ami*, you will always give to the beggars,’ said his wife reproachfully, as she saw a shower of coppers fall at the dirty feet of the piece of decrepitude who hooked in their gondola to the landing.

‘ Never again, my own one,’ he said penitently. ‘ They weighed so heavy in my pocket. But see, I have none left ; this shall be the last offence, I promise you.’

On the threshold of their apartments stood a pair of children on the tiptoe of expectation, their eyes dancing in their heads.

‘ You are sleepy, you monkeys,’ said Araciël. ‘ You may go to bed, then.’

A shout of derision answered him ; the young people were not to be taken in. Nothing but concessions were genuine coming from papa.

‘ Off we go, then !

The party hastened to reenter the gondola, and a second metal shower fell at the beggar’s feet.

‘ Some that remained over in my pocket from last time,’ apologised Araciël to his better half.

A *festa* in Venice must ever be unique for *spectacle*. Some two thousand gondolas thronged the lagunes that night. The Grand Canal was brilliantly illuminated ; and in its fringe of palaces every balcony, window, and flight of stairs was manned with sightseers.

Songs and serenades came echoing from two large barges, fancifully decorated with coloured glass lamps and flowers, each with its band of musicians on board, which moved up and down the lagune, followed by a floating mass of gondolas. Rockets and fireworks were let off at intervals, some from boats, some from the shore, suddenly revealing the faces of the crowd, the white domes, and red campanili, which gleamed for a moment, then vanished in darkness.

Midnight was the signal for a general move in the direction of St. Mark's, where a final illumination was to form a climax and to close the festivities. The children, among whom we must include Araciel, were, by this time, half wild with excitement and glee. Lights, glitter, and music were at all times enough to turn papa's head, never over firm on his shoulders; and as the party landed and followed in the stream of pedestrians hastening towards the Piazza, it was as much as could be done, by his wife on one side and Laurence on the other, to keep him from getting lost by running aside to look at a pretty bit of view, or to accost some stranger in whom he erroneously believed himself to have recognised a friend.

The Piazza was thronged. People of all ranks gathered fraternally together before the domes of St. Mark, in the most famous and most beautiful square in the world, to enjoy side by side the *bonne bouche* of the night's panorama.

Venice was so busy amusing itself, and the limelight played such strange tricks with the sky, that no one took heed of some black angry-looking thunder-clouds rising fast; and when presently a violent peal burst overhead, it came with the startling

effect of a cannon-shot. The first heavy drops of an impending rain-shower struck dismay into the ladies in silk attire, and two or three vivid flashes of lightning, and crashes of thunder that followed in an instant, completed the panic. A stampede ensued, every one rushed into the arcades; the crowd that a minute ago had filled the open square was trying to compress itself into the small covered space under the colonnades. These affording but few and narrow outlets into the city, there resulted a crush, in which those under shelter were in some danger of being flattened against the shuttered shop-fronts.

Araciel's party had been sundered in a moment. His wife still clung to his arm, Domenico to hers; but a surging mass had interposed between them and Laurence, who, with Cherubina, was forced away by the living stream, pushing in cross-directions.

Laurence had need of all her courage and presence of mind to protect the terrified child, who was small for her age, and coming off but second best in the crowd. A deluge of rain swept over the Piazza, and occasioned a second more determined rush. Cherubina half-disappeared, and Laurence, in trying to extricate her, was getting badly crushed herself, when a bystander came to her aid, shouldered back the mob by main force, and lifted up the child, who, half-mad with fright, held on like a little cuttle-fish to this strong rock of defence that had suddenly presented itself.

The crowd still wedged them in closely on every side; Laurence was incoherently thanking Cherubina's preserver, unaware, in the darkness and confusion, whether she were addressing a prince or a pedlar, an Italian who would understand what she was say-

ing, or an American who would not.

Gervase was divided between impatience with the stupidity of the crowd, who *would* push instead of quietly filing off, and amusement at his position, a succourer of damsels in distress, as he stood, with a fair-haired girl clinging tightly to his shoulder, and making a barricade of his person to protect the dark-haired one by his side.

The current had carried them on to a point where a narrow alley issues from the Piazza. Gervase seized the moment, and contrived to pilot his *protégée* out of the colonnade. The side street was comparatively clear, and they breathed freely again. Gervase put down Cherubina, who was overcome with surprise to find she was not injured. The other girl, whose face he could not see, it was muffled up with black lace, was thanking him again in a sweet low voice.

'But for you the child might have been badly hurt. I am not strong enough to lift her.'

'I should think not,' said Gervase, smiling, trying to discern her features, for the first time with a thought of identification. 'Can I be of any further use to you? Your friends—'

'We have missed them in the crowd.'

'You will scarcely find them again. My gondola is here at the landing. Pray let me escort you home.'

The rain was falling heavily; there was no time to deliberate; the matter decided itself. In a minute they were seated inside.

The light fell on Laurence's face as she stepped into the boat, and Gervase had recognised her. But under the coffin-like shelter of the gondola it was too dark for herself to get more than a

shadowy glimpse of the unknown cavalier whose timely offer had been so readily accepted.

Perhaps it was the gentleness of his manner, the tact and consideration that pervaded his conversation and demeanour, and prevented embarrassment, or perhaps that the excitement of playing was still upon her, quickening her nerves, exhilarating her senses; but Laurence felt an indefinable sensation of ease, almost enjoyment, during that strange brief voyage; talked without effort and with animation. Her address had all the charm of a Frenchwoman's; but there was more softness and seriousness in her countenance than usually accompanies that acute and active type. Five minutes, and they were in sight of the Vittoria Hotel. Cherubina was bemoaning herself; she was wet and cold.

'O what a nasty, nasty end to so nice a *festa*!'

'I don't know,' said Laurence gaily. 'I think we had all enjoyed the *festa* through first—I did.'

'For my part,' said Gervase, 'I would not have had it end in any other way for the world.'

The good-humour of her companions somehow unaccountably increased Cherubina's fractiousness.

'I don't like Venice,' she asserted roundly; 'it's nasty. I'm so glad we don't stay.' Gervase's countenance fell. 'I hope Rome won't be anything like this. Don't you, Renza?'

Gervase's countenance rose.

'When do you go to Rome?' he asked.

'For the winter,' said Laurence vaguely.

They alighted.

'Monsieur,' said Laurence, with the natural animation that gives a charm to the simplest words and

actions, 'how can I thank you for your kindness to us—strangers?'

Gervase's reply, which was something about helping angels unawares, given low and half-laughing, was caught by Cherubina.

'Who is he?' she asked sharply.  
Laurence laughed.

'Child, how should I know?'

Yet she was perplexed at something; the ghost of a reminiscence.

'He looked at you as if he knew you,' said Cherubina, puzzled; then she burst into a laugh. 'Why, of course, he had seen you at the concert. How stupid I am!'

It was another hour before the rest of their party arrived. Araciels had insisted on pursuing half a dozen imaginary Laurences before his wife could persuade him that the girls had probably gone home. By this time not a gondola was to be procured; so they started to walk back to the Vittoria, and would have spent the whole night in walking away from it, had not Madame, chancing fortunately to look round, caught a glimpse of it in a street behind them.

Gervase had lost his party, too; but had found a little adventure that made amends. He dwelt on it all the way back to Danieli's. There was something new in his mood that made him think that the illuminations or the music or the electricity in the atmosphere had affected his brain.

On reaching his hotel he found a note awaiting him. It was Linda's scrawl. He was on earth again, and for the moment all else was forgotten.

She had been offered an engagement by an opera director at Vienna, one it was her plain interest, artistically speaking, to accept. Only it would oblige her to quit Venice at once. 'I shall be sorry to leave,' she wrote, 'and most of all because no one,

least of all yourself, regrets it. If you want to wish me good-bye, come to-morrow morning.'

So finishes the *festa*. The next day the Hôtel Danieli is in a great state of bustle. The Breretons leave for the Tyrol, and as much fuss is made about it as if it were a royal progression, greatly to the annoyance of Sir Adolphus.

The Araciels left Venice in the evening. No fuss attended their going or staying. From noon onwards Laurence had been waiting in vain at the Vittoria. No Linda appeared, and the sun set without bringing any sign of the fair delinquent, who had, in fact, forgotten all about that tryst. The Araciels laughed at Laurence's disappointment.

'My dear child,' said Madame severely, 'she did quite right not to come. Mdlle. Visconti is no friend for you. Do you understand?'

Laurence said nothing. Linda had been a friend to her long ago, she understood that best. That all worth having in their friendship had been on her side alone was an idea that had never occurred to her, and it pained her to hear these hard things said, hard truths though they might be.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BROTHER AND SISTER.

It was about two months after that *festa* night that a stranger halted in Venice, making inquiries for Mdlle. Visconti, late of the Malibran Theatre.

The stranger had arrived after dark, and in a third-class carriage. He put up at an obscure and not particularly reputable inn, and his researches were made with circumspection, furtively.

They were made in vain. One told him one story; one another.

She was singing in Milan, stated the innkeeper. She had left for Vienna two months ago, thought the waiter. A gondolier affirmed positively that she had been seen yesterday on the Lido. She had been staying all the while in Venice *incognita*, the informant believed, and he gave the stranger an address on the Giudecca, which proved to be a wrong one. For good information, like other good things, must be paid for accordingly; and the inquirer's pockets seemed to be very thinly lined.

Two days he lingered in Venice, and on the third evening (he never went out till towards dusk, and carefully avoided the fashionable frequented streets and piazzas) he stood lounging over a dilapidated bridge in a remote deserted wing of the town, remarking within himself that he was approaching the end of his resources, and must go on his way without fulfilling the object of his visit.

Just then he saw a lady step out of a gondola that had drawn up before a house, not a stone's throw from where he stood. She was veiled, Venetian fashion; still he had a sense of recognition, and was hastening forwards to reconnoitre, when he started back, and instinctively effaced himself behind a pillar. She was not alone.

Before he could bethink himself, the lady had disappeared into the house, her companion into the gondola, which was soon out of sight. The watcher took the number of the house, and retraced his steps to his hostelry, whence, the same evening, he despatched a messenger to make certain inquiries. The result was that the next morning Linda received the following missive:

'My Sister,—I am in Venice for a few hours, on my way back to Rome, and would not leave without seeing you. It is impossible for me to come to your house. My movements are spied upon, my footsteps dogged, my acquaintances marked; it might involve you in trouble. Appoint some place of meeting out of doors, after dusk.'

The answer came duly, without delay:

'At Ave Maria—in the public gardens.'

That the public gardens of a city should be selected as the most fitting place for a private interview will surprise no one acquainted with Venice. There, on a promontory outstretching from the artisan's quarter of the town, lie these dreary pleasure-grounds, forsaken, except by children and invalids. Linda, who dared neither refuse to see her brother nor meet him in absolute solitude, knew what she was about when she appointed this meeting-place, as insuring him sufficient privacy and her protection.

Towards sundown she left her abode, dressed with the utmost simplicity, and wearing a thick veil. Her gondoliers set her down at some distance from the rendezvous. She dismissed them, and entered the gardens, where she walked up and down the wide dull terraces for what seemed to her a long while, waiting in a state of growing trepidation. From their childhood upwards Bruno had been a perpetual source of apprehension to her. As a boy by his outbreaks of temper, as a youth by his violent language and self-assumed imperious authority over her, from which Linda, however, in her own way, had very speedily thought fit to emancipate

herself. Since then his vagaries of a political nature, of which he talked and wrote pompously so as to encourage her in her wildest suppositions, filled her with dismay and vague dread. She tried to forget him, but withal that he sent her occasional reminders of his existence like the present; he was all the kith and kin she had in the world, and her thoughts of themselves would revert to him at times, especially times of adversity.

She had been straining her eyes in the distance in all directions, when suddenly she barely stifled a scream on perceiving him whom she had come to meet standing almost close to her under a tree. Just like Bruno to start up, as it were, out of the ground. His cloak flung over his shoulder half concealed his features; he had seen her, and advanced a step or two.

'Bruno!' she began hesitatingly. The folds of his wrapper fell back, disclosing a face of a naturally handsome, even delicate type, effectually disfigured by a sinister sullen expression, and a ragged growth of hair and beard, accompanied by an ostentatious slovenliness of appearance.

Linda extended her hand with the peculiar cordiality with which we caress a dog of whose teeth we are secretly afraid, but more afraid to show it.

'My sister!' He scrutinised her and her plain black toilet with a quick glance, and then said, in a less hard voice, 'I wanted to see you, if only for a moment, and even at a risk. As you know, I have broken with the world, the world you have to live in, and we cannot meet often; still, there are ties,—and you are all I have left now. Since I heard you were here I waited, trying to find you out.'

'We meet so seldom, indeed!'

sighed Linda sympathetically. 'Our paths are so different; it is a chance if they cross.'

He nodded, and observed uncomfortably,

'And who knows but this may be the last time!'

'What do you mean?' she asked, intimidated by something in his tone.

His countenance darkened.

'I have told you I am surrounded by hostile forces,' he said. 'I and all my associates. Our enemies' game is, by dint of petty persecution, to provoke us to some outbreak that will enable them to clap the prison-doors upon us. Well, they are the strongest. But one day we may be.'

Linda shuddered.

'What brings you to Venice?' she asked faintly.

'The wrong and oppression of powers whose slaves we are,' he said bitterly. 'The association I belong to sent me to Germany—to Kronstadt. I had a tobacconist's business there, and was doing well. The authorities ejected me, without compensation and without warning.'

'What for?'

'For speaking the truth,' he said self-complacently; 'for presuming to speak it plainly in the light of day. They have made it a crime now, and call it using seditious language.'

'What did you say?' she asked curiously.

'What I have said always, and shall say again in spite of them,' he returned, with the composure of the dreary, cold, unshrinking fanaticism which so appalled his life-loving easy-going sister. 'That what men call law and justice is only legalised wrong—property, but protected robbery; and monarchy, a disease, to be stamped out if necessary by the extirpation of those who propagate it—'

'How could you be so foolish, so imprudent!' she cried spontaneously.

He laughed derisively.

'Well, my little sister, there was more; but never fear that I shall hurt your tender ears with ugly truths they cannot understand. After all, it was not of myself and my affairs, but of you and yours, that I wished to speak.'

'You helped me in old times,' said Linda soothingly. 'If you are in any difficulty, Bruno, I might perhaps—'

'No, no,' he interposed; 'not so bad as that. In Rome, and at our city of Velletri, I have friends, comrades, who would supply me if the worst came. Tell me of your engagements for the winter. I like to know your movements.'

'I start for Cairo very soon. I have been singing here during the season.'

'You are happy?' he asked, looking at her curiously.

'Quite, quite happy,' said Linda gaily.

'One thing more. I saw you leaving a gondola yesterday. Who was it with you?'

He spoke with a crafty nonchalance that did not impose upon Linda; she, too, had her share of Italian cunning.

'Did you see him?' she inquired promptly.

'No; I was looking at you.'

'Ah, then you didn't recognise Tebaldo, the tenor singer; you remember him, I daresay; he was a Velletrano, like ourselves.'

Bruno's countenance cleared.

'I know about him: yes, an honest fellow; he was a boatman on the Tiber, was he not?'

'Yes, yes,' put in Linda hastily; 'some gentleman was struck by his fine voice, had him taught for the stage. He sang here with me during the summer.'

'Well,' rejoined Bruno after a pause, 'if ever you wish to marry, my sister, and your choice should fall on an honest man of that sort, poor though I am, all that I have you and he shall share. Only,' his brow clouded over again with sullen contemptuous suspicion as he added, 'no entanglements with any of those rich vagabonds enjoying their pleasant idleness, made possible by the slaving and starving of the poor. If ever that chanced, I should no longer call you sister.'

The threat in itself did not sound very terrible to Linda. But she had an insurmountable dread of scenes with Bruno, and was bent on averting the present crisis.

She held a trump card in her hand, and came out with it now.

'Bruno,' she said, it was her turn to be self complacent, 'there was a count here—a Polish nobleman—who asked me to be his wife. I would not hear of it, or of him.'

'That was well,' he said. 'Keep to that path, if you wish to keep a friend and ally in me. And now we have talked long enough; we are attracting notice, which I want to avoid, for your sake even more than my own.'

They parted. Linda returned home on foot at hurried speed, reaching it breathless, in a state of agitation that deeply distressed her elderly *soubrette* Virginie. The young lady sank into a chair, fanning herself, smelling her salts, and exclaiming, '*Madre di Dio!* how my heart beats! Bruno, what have I done, that heaven should send me such a brother!'

'Has he been scolding you, then, the ruffian?' asked Virginie indignantly. Virginie was old, she was deaf and stupid, but attached after her manner, and Linda had no secrets from her. 'Or worse; threatening, I dare-say.'

'Yes—no—I don't know,' said her mistress incoherently; 'he is a threat himself; I feel his presence like one. Who are these tyrants and oppressors he is always railing at? You, Bruno, are the only tyrant of whom I am really afraid.'

'Come, come, you are a child; what is there to fear?' said the other practically. 'He couldn't harm you if he wished. Thank the Virgin, we live in a civilised country. There are laws to protect us, not to speak of one to whom the signora's safety is as dear as his own. The signor Inglese—'

'Mr. Damian is in Rome by this time,' broke in Linda; 'Heaven be praised for that.'

Why she should praise Heaven was past Virginie's understanding. Only yesterday she had been inconsolable at his departure. And though Virginie (who knew her mistress very well) believed her to be a sensible and long-headed woman, on this one point she considered Linda as foolish as any schoolgirl could be, and never hesitated to tell her so.

Linda composed herself, and thought over their interview. She took counsel then with Virginie seriously, and the result was that they decided to leave Venice quietly the next morning. The chief part of their preparations for moving was made already, and it was an easy matter to hurry their departure. Anything to avoid a second, perhaps a stormy, interview with Bruno, who Linda felt was unlikely to be long imposed upon by the decidedly flattered picture of herself she had presented to him. Linda was no hypocrite; but as to braving personal explanations with a mortal like Bruno, whom she regarded as so wrong-headed and violent as to be scarcely responsible for his actions when provoked, it was out of the ques-

tion. For the rest, the sooner he knew the truth about her the better. And yet there was a perverse, lingering, mournful regret behind that so it should be. Although this brother had never entitled himself to her respect, nor yet merited her affection, the idea that he should lose all fellow-feeling for her, and judge her, as he infallibly would, more harshly than even she deserved, was still very bitter to her. For, underneath all her fear and aversion lurked a strange irrational feeling that they would never shake each other off, as it were a sense of some affinity of nature which not unfrequently involves a mysterious affinity of destiny too.

Perhaps of all the untruths Linda had told to her brother, the most glaring was that she was happy. Never had Virginie seen her so odd and restless and dispirited. Tossing over the articles in her dressing-case that night, she suddenly chanced on a trinket, a forgotten trifle that, however, when she had made a sale of her jewels a year ago, she had kept back from the hammer, a lyre-shaped gold clasp set with jewels. Virginie saw her snatch it up and cover it with kisses, whereupon the ancient maid remarked contemptuously,

'What a fuss about an old-fashioned brooch, to be sure!'

'It was the first thing he gave me,' said Linda pathetically.

Virginie was not touched. She was a woman who would speak her mind sometimes. 'Per Bacco, I'm ashamed of you,' she declared. 'Are you not too proud to make so much more account of the hearts of these young highfliers than they of yours?'

Linda sprang to her feet and darted an angry glance at her handmaid. Her countenance overspread; for a moment she looked

like Bruno. The suspicion faded, she smiled obstinately, and shook her head, saying waywardly,

' Nay, nay, he loves me very well still ; and I—well, you were right, quite right. I loved him from the first moment I saw him, like a fool that I am.'

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE VEILED STATUE.

Of all the rising sculptors at that time settled in Rome, not one but would have liked to change places with Valentine Romer. Even those whose position and fortune were made, envied him sometimes—as men past their prime envy those who have still the best to look forward to. But although few among the younger artists were counted more promising by connoisseurs, many stood higher in popular favour. For Val was an original, with rough knobs and angles of disposition in plenty, and had never knocked under to a human creature.

Such aggressive independence would have meant perpetual obscurity to a mediocre artist. It required no less signal talent and indomitable energy than Val possessed to absolve him from the necessity of clawing any person, private or professional, in his humour. The world wanted him, and must in the end accept him as he was born—a very rough diamond.

Already they consented to be good-naturedly amused at his candour, verging on brutality ; his bluff humorous speeches were repeated as 'good things.' Men, whose statues are likely to bring in, literally, their weight in gold, can afford a certain license of action and expression. Already his studio was entered in the

guide-books as not the least interesting among the sights of Rome.

Far away from the well-known thoroughfares, on the open elevated ground known as the Celian Hill, and within a stone's throw of the Porta Laterana, stood the Villa Marta. When Val Romer first took it, two years ago, his friends murmured over the site, so near the malaria-haunted Campagna. 'Welcome the malaria,' he replied grimly ; 'a good scarecrow to keep visitors away !' curious idlers that devoured up the ambitious artist's precious time; locusts whose ravages he dreaded more than Roman fever. For himself, he had a constitution as tough as leather and as hard as iron, which it seemed as if nothing could shake.

The villa itself was of the humblest pretensions ; a mere dot in a garden wilderness ; an insignificant appendage to the adjacent long low building of white stone ; a miniature Greek Doric temple, where the sculptor 'received,' and in whose surrounding sheds the sculptor worked.

The temple itself was in three divisions. The first and largest was ranged with statues, Val's finished works ; so to speak, the gods of the fane, never long the same in this Pantheon. Val's productions were in increasing request. One feature, however, remained pretty constant : the majority of these gods were goddesses. Val's first successes had been obtained in renderings of different types of female beauty ; his art instincts inclining him to this field in sculpture as the most promising, because that which offers a modern sculptor his best chance of fresh, and as yet unachieved, achievement.

Among the pale beauties on the ranks there is not a single Venus, or Amazon, or Grecian nymph competing for the first place in

your favour. Of the three that divide the palm, none are classical subjects. There is Carmen, the gipsy-girl—counted by some to be his happiest conception—a wild, untamable, supple creature of the woods, semi-human, like the Fauns of the ancients; Salome, an ideal of Oriental voluptuous beauty and grace; and Vashti, a majestic imperial figure, one grown ‘rigid in resistance,’ as it were turned to stone by grief denied expression, calamity beyond fathoming. It is on the strength of these statues three, the sculptor’s latest and most ambitious works, that Rome has decided that Val’s future is of importance to mankind, and his career is watched with interest.

Beyond, was a curtained-off adytum, where the sculptor worked occasionally; and here again a second curtain screened an innermost shrine containing a single statue.

The little temple was at all times a marvel of neatness, and ingenious, precise arrangement. Val was a martinet in such matters, as Brutus, a young Italian workman who was responsible for the order of the studio, knew to his cost. It had on its best face to-day. The acolyte, as he went round, detected traces of his master’s hand: fresh flowers, the orange-trees newly trimmed, a statue or a bust’s position shifted. And Brutus nodded his sagacious head, saying within himself,

‘Miladi is coming.’

‘Brutus, my son!’ said a commanding voice from within the adytum.

‘His servant?’ responded Brutus promptly.

‘Have you put straight the curtain that hung out of the perpendicular, and made me squint all day yesterday?’

‘I have,’ answered Brutus.

‘And set the fountain spouting, as I desired?’

‘It is done.’

‘And is the studio swept and garnished? I counted at least a dozen dead leaves exposed and ready for you to come and bury them.’

‘The signor, if he distrusts, had better come and see for himself,’ said Brutus, whose feelings were wounded by this catechism.

‘Then, Brutus, having done your duty like a simple Englishman, you may now go and be idle like a noble Roman for the remainder of the day. I say, Brutus, does it never seem strange to you that your forefathers should have conquered mine?’

‘No, signor,’ responded the glib Italian; ‘for do I not see your excellency here choosing to submit himself to our laws sooner than to those of Great Britain?’

‘Very good, Brutus,’ said the sculptor, lifting the partition curtain and emerging from the adytum in his blouse and cap, tools in hand. ‘But there is a stupid Act of Parliament in our country that decrees there shall every third day be a fog in London which takes two days to clear off. That, Brutus, is the law that makes an exile of your master, as I have often told you.’

Here Brutus, at the sound of approaching carriage-wheels, went off to open the garden-gates. The sculptor stood with the look of peculiar impatience on his face of a man awaiting something he dreads and desires in about equal measure. Then he came forwards, courteous, smiling, and bland, to receive the sitter, Lady Brereton, on whose bust he was at present engaged.

He was scrupulously polite today—why, he was almost conven-

tional—in other words he was on his guard. In a few minutes he and she are *vis-à-vis*, and he is noting fresh perfections in the clear-cut lines of her face.

Artistes are privileged fellows. Lady Brereton had made a considerable sensation since her arrival in Rome, a few weeks before. Not one of the *jeunesse dorée* of the city but would have given worlds to be in Mr. Romer's shoes at this present moment. Diana kept her admirers at a more than respectful—a reverential distance. She had absolutely refused to sit for her portrait to any one in Rome; but when Sir Adolphus suggested a bust, she consented, merely stipulating that Mr. Romer, whose acquaintance they had recently made in England not long after a certain day when Val woke up to find himself famous, should be the modellist.

Never a good sitter, Diana this morning, by her constant changes of countenance, very soon exhausted the scant stock of patience with which Val was endowed. From expostulation he proceeded to exhortation, thence to command, thence to reproaches.

Lady Brereton liked to put him out of temper. It made her feel vaguely, 'If I were not what I am, I could be afraid of him. How delightful, to be once afraid!'

'Pray do not be too exacting to-day,' she said at last. 'I never profess to be able to pose for Patience on a monument, and something has happened this morning which has put me into particularly high spirits. Sir Adolphus has finally decided on remaining in Rome for the spring.'

'That is good news for me indeed,' said Val cheerfully. He saw on her face the shadow of a smile, betraying a passing feeling which gratified him, he hardly

knew why. 'The best of all good news,' he continued; 'for it means that you will be able to give me as many sittings for your bust as I may want, and that I shall not have to hurry, which I hate, or risk turning out a piece of work not so good as I could make it.'

There was a pause. Then she said, with a slight, not at all unpleasant, irony,

'I should like to be an artist. You ought really to be the happiest people in the world. Tell me, Mr. Romer, don't you consider it the ideal state?'

'How so?' asked Val cautiously.

'Because your work is all in all to you. Outside events can have no power to affect your mind or your life.'

'And you ladies, who sit to us for your portraits, may be thankful for it,' returned Val philosophically. 'Take myself at this moment. The Papacy may be overthrown, the Stock Exchange abolished, the British constitution stand on its head, Lady Brereton's bust will not suffer—not an eyelash. The artist goes on with his work; his hand doesn't shake.'

'Exactly; and that is your good fortune—to be so absorbed in a thing that you can always put it first absolutely, and let the rest go. Do you not consider it so?' she asked insinuatingly, as if to provoke a denial.

'I do,' said Val stoutly. 'You are quite right. Art is the best mistress a man can have; she can never deceive or disenchant him. You see it's impossible she should betray his love, since there can be no question of her returning it.'

Presently Lady Brereton raised her eyes, saying,

'Might that not tell both ways?' Val glanced at her inquiringly.

'I know it is possible to make Art a sort of religion,' said Diana; 'that men and women come and immolate their lives to her service, as monks and nuns do to the Church, and find consolation there when they have failed to get their own will or way in the world. I do not think, though, the monks and nuns were happy always. Perhaps the artists are.'

Val preserved silence and an immovable countenance.

'Tell me,' she asked by and by, with irresistible frank interest, 'has she always been everything to you?'

'Yes, since I found, or fought, my way to her; and that, Lady Brereton, was nine years ago.'

'Ah, you had great difficulties to contend with, I know; I always heard that.'

Val was the most reticent of men, and especially on the subject of himself. It needed a Diana Brereton to draw him out.

'Yes, I had difficulties,' he replied; 'insuperable difficulties one would say. Yet here I am, you see, to prove the contrary.'

'I wish you would let me hear about them,' she said, 'and how you overcame them. Tell me; it will do me good. Life is made too easy, I often think, to such as myself.'

'O,' said Val simply, 'it was at starting that circumstances were my worst enemies.'

And Diana, who knew no more than that he was a man of no birth, listened prepared for a tale of struggles with poverty and obscurity.

'Claude Lorraine began life as a pastrycook,' said Val deliberately, 'whose pictures popes came afterwards to bid for, offering to cover them with pieces of gold. My case was far worse. My father had a hundred thousand pounds—'

If his object were to startle

his patroness he had succeeded. She listened amazed as he continued,

'To which I was born heir apparent, with nothing to learn but how to spend it. I was to have sunshine all day—even temperature—no frosts, no winds. Well, what came of all these fine prospects? At sixteen I was an orphan and a pauper. Ruin and death had come, destroyed my home, and cut me off with a shilling and an uncle, a solicitor in Bloomsbury. That was a change of air, and no mistake, Lady Brereton. But all this can have no interest for you, that I see. I don't know why I should inflict it.'

'Only inflict it,' she said, smiling, 'and I will tell you why another time.'

Val acquiesced politely.

'A change as nice and pleasant,' he resumed, 'as to be shot from the equator to the North Pole. If my soul had caught its death of cold, if all the milk of human kindness in me had been frozen up among those dear poor relations of mine, who wouldn't let me starve—' he stopped short.

'A solicitor, did you say?' put in Diana sympathetically.

'Yea. There was I nailed to a desk, with a quill behind my ear, a bad calculating-machine—like this.'

Diana was laughing heartily. Val had seated himself before a stand, stuck his chisel through his hair, and drawn a long puckered miserable face. Then he resumed his work and his dignity.

'And charity, charity, charity, O! dinned into my ears all day long, for fear I should forget I was a charity boy. My father had been wise and lucky, and had grown rich. These fellows had been stupid, and stuck, and I was to pay for it all! I know I put down in my note-book, that of all

the Christian virtues the hardest to bear with is charity.'

Again Lady Brereton laughed. 'What dreadful people!' she murmured.

'Of the whole pack the worst was a woman, aunt Patty, a spinster of forty.'

'Worse and worse,' sighed Diana.

'Long, lean, with piercing little eyes,' he said, screwing up his own in imitation, 'backed up by a pair of sharp spectacles. "Valentine," said those spectacles to me every day at dinner, "you worthless son of my worthless brother-in-law, you are eating the bread of charity. I'll take care it shall stick in your throat."

'I think I hear her,' ejaculated Diana.

'Not an old maid of the old school,' he continued, 'given up to knitting and tea and scandal. Knitting she thought a useless coil, scandal enfeebled the mind, and tea the constitution.'

'I see her distinctly,' said Lady Brereton.

Val gave a few touches to the clay he was engaged upon, and then proceeded deliberately:

'If I had a yacht, and chose a figure-head, I should carve her; if I had a church, it should be dedicated to her memory. And as I have neither a yacht nor a church, I have named my little house after her, "Villa Marta."

Lady Brereton raised her eyebrows in incredulous surprise.

'A woman who hates needle-work is of course never idle,' Val continued. 'Aunt Patty's hobby was modelling. There was a room in the house, where she worked, and in which I was forbidden, under pain of everlasting punishment, ever to put my head. I had had a glimpse once, and the sight of the clay, the modelling tools and casts, haunted me night and day.

Three months I endured it. One day, when she was out, I went in and modelled a hand, and left it as my carte de visite to surprise her. She was not superstitious, but told me since that for a moment she thought the arch-fiend had been there in her absence. After that she let me come in and draw designs for her; she sent for me in the evenings to teach me. One day she observed that *I* was teaching *her*. Without a word to me she went to my uncle, and resigned my appointment for me, saying I was a sculptor, and should never make anything but a bad clerk. My uncle objected. She did not try to convince him, saying she had not time, and it was besides of no consequence. She ruled the house; and I was sent to some marble-works. Once started in the right track, one has only to fight one's own way.'

'You must have fought well,' remarked Diana, 'to have got on so rapidly.'

'I had good luck,' said Val modestly. 'Of course starting so late I had to make up for lost time and work double. But if I have been so fortunate as to make my mark more quickly than others who deserve it as well or better, I lay it to the happy chance that a statue of mine chanced to attract notice at the late International Exhibition. It brought me to the front, and into favour, as only popular works can do.'

'The Glee Maiden, of course,' said Lady Brereton. 'I have heard so much of it. But I was out of England at the time, and missed seeing it, to my great regret.'

'It was sold,' he said carelessly.

To a royal bidder, as Lady Brereton remembered to have heard.

'Gone to Russia, exiled to'

Siberia by this time, perhaps,' he said jestingly.

'And I am told you have made but one copy, which you keep here.'

He bowed assent.

'And which you will never show.'

'It is to save me from refusing applications to repeat it, which I don't want to do,' he said frankly.

'The Glee Maiden,' said Lady Brereton, perplexed. 'The name tells me nothing. Who was she?'

'The Glee Maiden is a Provençal girl, a female troubadour, minstrel at the courts of love. The name did not suggest the statue; I thought of it afterwards. My muse-musical is modern. It was neither a daughter of Apollo nor a St. Cecilia that I had in my imagination. An improvisatrice, such as you might meet to-day, if you were lucky. One of those happy devotees we were talking of just now. Well, that statue made my reputation in London.'

'I know the rest,' she said, smiling. 'Your path, I suppose, was smooth thenceforward.'

'Smooth? I beg your pardon,' said Val, with animation. 'Nothing but hills of difficulty, if you please. It is the easiest thing in the world to make a reputation, and the hardest to keep it up. For that, one has to go on rising, rising steadily and distinctly, and for a very long time too.'

He paused a moment, and then resumed :

'My little Glee Maiden has had rivals. It was absolutely necessary I should make successors that should cut her out, and they say that I have. My best work has been done since. Yet with all her faults she is my pet child. Because she is the petrification of my earliest, freshest inspiration,'

he concluded, rather to himself than to Lady Brereton.

'It is very good-natured of you to have told me all this,' said she presently. 'I cannot tell you how it has interested me.'

'No thanks, no thanks,' he said plainly. 'You have repaid me already, though you don't know it. I cannot tell you how still you have been the last half-hour. I have made more progress than in all the sittings before.'

The sitter now intimated that she was tired, which brought the day's work to a close. The artist acquiesced, with a bad grace.

'And the Glee Maiden?' said Diana beseechingly.

With a helpless smile Val yielded, and, going towards the curtain that partitioned off the inmost division, he drew it aside, disclosing a veiled marble figure in a niche. Val lifted the gauze.

The simplicity of the composition was such that at first Diana was puzzled to say what it could be that made the effect so striking. It recalled no famous statue, ancient or modern. Of something, however, it did seem to remind her, but of what she could not tell.

A youthful figure, standing, leaning against a tree, her viol in her hand. The attitude was restful, the countenance inspired and strung up; the musical improvisation was just over, but the tone-poet's mind lingers in the clouds one moment longer, the moment here chosen by the sculptor.

'So that is your ideal,' she let fall as she gazed.

'An ideal impersonation of song,' corrected Val judiciously.

'It is very beautiful,' she said slowly, oppressed with the difficulty familiar to highly-cultured minds of expressing the intelligent admiration they only can experience. 'In spite of all I had

heard I had formed no idea of it.' She looked long and intently, then turned from the marble to the sculptor. Possibly a masterpiece from another hand, though eliciting equal admiration, would not have commanded the same flattering attention.

'Forgive me,' she said, with that mixture of light and earnest in manner that so sorely perplexed her admirers, and that Val thought he understood and found so charming, 'but when I see that statue I must ask myself, not for the first time, as you know, what has England done that you, who belong to us by rights, should desert your country and your countrymen—'

She had touched a critical subject, a subject on which Val at this instant found no safety but in silence, and in silence he took refuge. Often, before this fair lady, this famous man found himself looking and feeling like a shamed schoolboy. She waited; then, assured her little speech had taken effect, she held out her hand, saying,

'I receive next Tuesday. Shall we see you?'

He promised to come, escorted her to the gates, and as the carriage drove off remained for some moments with his eyes fixed on the spot where it had disappeared.

Then he slowly retraced his steps to the temple, unconscious that Brutus was watching him narrowly, walked down between the two files of tutelary marble divinities, and flung himself on a seat in the adytum, with the air of a wrestler nerving himself for a tussle.

Not with an adversary, or with misfortune, but with himself. Every time that he and his lady-friend met now was followed by at least a quarter of an hour of mental anarchy. Val would have

given worlds to be as indifferent as he seemed. This still, deep, growing influence of the woman of the world over the artist had begun —how long since! He knows exactly.

It was the summer before last, at Hawkwood, Sir Adolphus's estate in Hampshire. Val, who in his character of one of the lions of the preceding London season, had formed a slight acquaintance with the Breretons, had been enticed down to their country place for a few days. There was some question of his designing a fountain for a certain site in the park, that decided his coming.

Diana soon saw he was a lion in more senses than one, less approachable and tamable than lions and Samsons in general. Did a fancy take her sometimes to draw his claws and be lion queen? Did she covet ascendancy in that quarter? She recognised his artistic power, and was not one of those to whom a warrant from Apollo carries no recommendation unless accompanied by something of Apollo's semblance. To hold the destiny of a genius in her hands, to be free to play fast and loose with the weal and woe of a man whose talent made the delight of millions, had a superior sort of fascination for her. She had never had such a thing on her captive-list.

Val's roughness and surly independence piqued her; but they were never or rarely offensive. He had the better part of good breeding which genius gives, and Sir Adolphus's wife was sated with the *petits soins*, the *fuderies*, *niaiseuries* (things for which the English tongue has no equivalent, though they are at least as plentiful here as abroad) of her admirers in her own set, natures mentally and morally enervated, like herself. O to subdue this divine bear! to

make him pliable for her, and her alone!

One evening, that Val is just now recalling—a sultry July evening—there were a number of guests staying at Hawkwood, and Sir Adolphus had summoned the whole party out on the lawn towards ten o'clock to look at a comet, reported to be visible to the long-sighted.

Val was intensely interested in this heavenly body. So was Lady Brereton, only she could not see it. This made him very impatient. Well, he may try and point it out to her, only not through the telescope, which made her eyes ache.

They crossed the lawn to look at another constellation. The big cedar that stood in the centre separated them from the party—it overshadowed them, hid the sky, and its boughs murmured above their heads.

As they emerged from its shade, she paused an instant, and said enthusiastically,

‘What a lovely night! Does not the garden look as if it were enchanted?’

The faint scent of the China roses on the terrace-wall, the restless swaying of the cedar-boughs, the rippling of the myriads of spiny leaves, the trickling of the water in the fish-pond, that graceful presence beside him, her light hand on his arm—yes, Val must acknowledge there was enchantment about.

‘On such a night,’ she continued, ‘I think one could believe in anything one wished. Could not you?’

‘I should beware,’ he said. ‘How if it were only to be undeceived by daylight?’

‘Nay,’ she said, ‘some things, when we have felt them once, become realities to us for ever.’

Was she speaking to herself or to him? His brain was in con-

fusion; they stood silent side by side.

‘Ah, I see it at last!’ she said suddenly, having caught sight of the comet across the boughs.

Val, as they walked back to rejoin the rest, felt also as if a meteor had flashed across him.

From that moment he looked upon Diana with a less censorious and unsympathetic eye. Her faults might be faults of education; her charm was original. She was a woman of a superior mind, whose friendship any man might desire and be proud of.

He no longer discouraged her by curtness and reserve, when she interrogated him about art. She wished to remove from herself the reproach of aristocratic ignorance. She would be so grateful if he would give her hints as to the direction of her art-studies, of which she was so fond, so fond. Poor Val!

Though no ladies’ favourite in general, he was adored by ladies in particular. His was the hard favour that acquaintance endears to us, as it becomes associated with an expression that we love, and that is more prominent than the clay. What inexhaustible energy of character lay there! What possibilities of exceptional achievement, or exceptional devotion!

Diana, when her intimate friends taxed her playfully with heartlessness and indifference, would reply, ‘I was born too old for an infatuation.’ Perhaps. But she cared to inspire one. Just now she was dominated by the idea of dominating a man’s life from a distance; a man courted by not a few charming women, but of whom it would be said, ‘He has never married, because of Lady Brereton. It is a chivalrous, exclusive attachment of his, an idea to which he is religiously faithful.’ For this pur-

pose she had made up her mind he was to come and settle in London.

She then found she had a rival, whose interests and hers here threatened to clash, and that was his work. Had she known the trouble she was giving her rival at that moment she might have exulted. He had struggled to prevent them from mutual interference. That was no longer possible.

He could not settle himself to work again that day, and went presently for a stroll in the gardens of the neighbouring Villa Wolkonski.

Brutus, anxious about his

master's welfare, had made many ingenious excuses for intruding upon him ; but his reception had not been reassuring. He had smoked five-and-twenty cigarettes, though, which was good, remarked Brutus, picking up the ends.

Lady Brereton drove home thinking of the Glee Maiden. Strange, that such a prosaic piece of humanity as Val Romer should originate anything so full of poetry and refinement !

She was puzzling over a floating reminiscence. Suddenly she caught hold of it. ' Ah, the violinist who played at the Fenice ! It was she of whom the statue reminded me.'

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## THE VICTORIA CROSS:

~~Major Creyke did not win it.~~

It was midwinter. The afternoon of a dull December day was drawing to a close, and as yet the lamps were not lighted in the drawing-room of the house which the Cotherstones called home. A blazing fire, however, lighted up the room sufficiently for little Mrs. Cotherstone to study the pages of a book which she held in her hand. The Colonel sat opposite, tired out by a hard day's work, and more than half asleep. The boy, now nearly a year old, was on the rug between them, holding a court-martial on his father's boots, occasionally pricking himself with the spurs, and making his tiny hands excessively dirty, his hands and his little embroidered frock.

'Ned,' remarked the Colonel's wife, *apropos* of nothing, 'I've been looking in the *Army List*.'

'Eh, what, my darling?' suddenly rousing himself into an upright position.

'I've been looking in the *Army List*,' she repeated.

'O, is that all? I thought something had happened to the boy,' sinking back in his chair again.

Reminded of the boy, Mrs. Cotherstone looked down, and, seeing his occupation, uttered a scream of disgust, which the child quickly echoed by a loud crow of delight.

'Dir—ty boy!' cried Mrs. Cotherstone, in energetic staccato tones; 'such a mess he's in. Ring the bell, Ned dear, please.'

The Colonel did as he was told, and a moment later our old friend Calcraft appeared, looking quite irreproachable in his faultless evening attire.

'Take him away, Calcraft,' cried the little lady; 'he has made himself so dirty with Colonel Cotherstone's boots.'

As Calcraft advanced, the child put out two dimpled arms to him, and expressed his satisfaction in a series of 'Boo-o-o-o's.'

'How fond he is of the child!' said the Colonel's wife, as the door closed.

'Yes,' answered the Colonel; 'he was rather sleepy.'

'I've been looking in the *Army List*,' Mrs. Cotherstone announced for the third time, 'and I cannot find anywhere that Major Creyke has the Victoria Cross.'

'Of course not,' returned the Colonel, with a laugh.

'But he has it.'

'Certainly not.'

'But they always call him V.C. Creyke,' she said, in a mystified tone.

'It is only a nickname, child; he often called her child, though she had a son of age.'

'However did he get such a name! O, I am so disappointed, Ned. I have been fancying all sorts of bravery; and now it has gone.'

'O, he has bravery and pluck enough; you need not be disappointed,' he answered. 'He gained the name out in the Mutiny, though he did not win the Cross itself.'

'And how was it?' she asked, with deep interest.

'Well, I can only give you the merest outlines of the story,' he said, 'for it's a good while ago, and my head was in a state of confusion for a long time after that awful business had been cleared up. Creyke's father and mine were, from their earliest boyhood, upon terms of the closest friendship; their fathers had been the same before them. My father owned the Hall; Creyke's father was rector of the parish. Well, Creyke was only a year younger than I was, and somehow we fell into the same line as our fathers and grandfathers had done before us, and our friendship was, I really believe, more passionate and tragically inclined than even theirs. We were lucky enough to get into the same regiment, and we were unlucky enough to be sent to India, soon after which the Mutiny broke out; it was *just* after you were married, Mary.'

'Yes,' she replied; 'but the regiment did not go.'

'No. The 6th Lancers were short of subalterns, having lost several by cholera or misadventure, and I volunteered to go; they wanted two. Of course Creyke insisted upon going too, though his father and mine came down to us, and did their best to persuade us not to go. It was no good. I had made up my mind, and Creyke's mind was mine; so we went. It was all very jolly at first: we liked India, there was any amount of splendid sport. We liked the regiment, and Colonel Cornwallis was of a downright good sort, with the sweetest, prettiest little wife you ever saw. The fellows used to fight almost ad to whether Mrs. Cornwallis or her sister, Miss Bannister, was the lovelier. For my part, I admired the Colonel's wife the more

of the two. I always did like fair women best. Miss Bannister was very dark, and it was no good any of the subalterns looking at her, for the Major went out in the same ship with her and made matters safe, though I don't think they were engaged. Well, the Mutiny broke out, and then we found what two splendid women they were! They had always been admired, but after the siege began they were simply idolised. How they worked! Nothing seemed too hard for them: they cooked and washed and nursed, until they were fairly worn out, always cheering us on, always ready in any emergency; they seemed to shrink from nothing. Mrs. Cornwallis made no distinction; it might be the sick baby of an officer's wife or of a private soldier, it was all the same to her; and as for Floss Bannister, I believe any man in the garrison would have walked straight into the enemy's lines at a word from her. Well, towards the end, Major Gurney was killed, and we thought the shock had killed her too; but, an hour after we had buried him, she went her rounds as usual. I never shall forget that night! Creyke and I were on duty together at one of the outposts, with one gun and perhaps a dozen men. We could see the black brutes moving about, but we couldn't hit them.

"I've had two shots at one of those black fiends," I heard one fellow growl to another; "and I've missed him both times."

"I don't expect we'll have no luck, since Miss Floss has given up comin'—not that we can expect it of her, the darlin';" for I must tell you she had been accustomed, in spite of her pressure of work inside the garrison, to visit the outposts every hour or so, ever since the chaplain died. At his

death she took up his work where he left it, poor chap, and she stuck to it bravely right up to the time of the Major's death. Every hour or so she used to come. Sometimes she sang a hymn or read a few words, or just said the Lord's Prayer; if a soldier's wife was ill, and he couldn't get off duty to see her, he might trust Miss Floss to bring him news half a dozen times a day. Well, after the Major was killed, we never expected to see her again; for it had been a terrible scene for her, and they carried her away from his poor body in a dead faint. We hadn't been back long from the funeral, and just as the trooper ended, "we can't expect it of her, the darlin'," she appeared.

"You ought not to have come," Creyke said to her reproachfully. "No one expected it of you, after such a shock as you have just had."

"My duty is to the living," she said, in a perfectly calm voice. "I have done my duty to the dead, and I thank God for it. Major Gurney has shown us all how gloriously we may do our duty, and I will not be the first to sit down and say, 'I can struggle no longer.'"

If her tears were dried up, Creyke's were not, and he turned away his head that she might not see them; he had loved her for months, poor chap, and I believe he would have given his life for Gurney's, if he could have taken that dreadful look of suffering out of her eyes. She turned away from him then.

"Is Robert Moss here?" she asked.

"Here, miss," he answered, stepping from behind another, with suspiciously wet eyes.

"Your wife seems a good deal better," she said. "I have just seen her, and she sent her love to you."

"Thank you, miss," he answered, turning away with eyes overflowing again; then, in choked voice, "Maybe you'll give my love to Mary, and say I'll come in as soon as ever I can get off."

She only stayed a few minutes, and just as she was moving away, a great hulking Irishman ran after her and caught her gown—a great brute, that had been one of the worst scamps in the regiment.

"Shure, miss, darlin'," he blurted out, "ye won't try to stop the blissid tears from comin'? They'll do ye a power o' good, Miss Floss, an' we can't bear to see ye look like that."

She lifted her soft dark eyes to his for a moment, and then she laid her little work-worn hand in his great fist.

"My tears are all burnt up, Michael," she said gratefully; "but I shall not forget what you said to me."

And then she went away, and our watch dragged on. Each day, for the past fortnight, we had been sure matters could not get any worse, but somehow they did.

It was not many days after this that they drove us back from that very outpost, and we were obliged to leave one of our few guns. The command had by that time fallen upon a man named Hood, a first-rate officer, though still rather young.

"It's a pity to let them have that gun," he exclaimed vexedly. "Their fire's bad enough, but to have our own guns turned against us will be too bad."

"Couldn't it be spiked, sir?" Creyke asked.

"Yes, of course; only the chances are ten to one against it's being done: the fire is so heavy there," he answered.

"Of course a dozen volunteers

stood out immediately, Creyke and I amongst the rest. I was chosen at once, and Creyke insisted upon going too. We were determined that the brutes should not have the gun; but, upon my word, it was anything but pleasant, running right in the face of the enemy's fire, with only a half-ruined wall for shelter. I can tell you we accomplished our task expeditiously—I know my only idea was how soon I could get out of danger; for we were in almost as much peril from our fellows' bullets as from the enemy's, as a continual cross-fire was kept up the whole time. Just as we turned for a rush, from the shelter of the half-ruined wall, I heard a yell from the black fiends behind us; and before I had gone three yards I came down to the ground with a crash, with what I knew must be a bullet in my shoulder and a second in my hip. Creyke heard only the yell, and ran on. I tried to get up and follow him; but I fell back, half-fainting with the pain, and shut my eyes, with a feeling that it was all up with me. I don't remember much more, until I found Creyke bending over me with more resolution in his face than I had ever seen in it before.

"It's all right, old chap," he said coolly. "The brutes have winged you, but I'll have you in-side in five minutes."

"Go back, you'll only get hit yourself," I answered.

"Can you use your legs?" he asked.

"Got a ball in my right hip."

I saw him take out his pen-knife and begin ripping up a scarf which happened to be lying near, and then I fancy I must have gone off again; for the next time I opened my eyes, Floss Bannister was bathing my fore-

head, and the doctor was bending over me.

"You're a noble fellow, Creyke," I heard Hood say. "If we are spared to get out of this, I shall recommend you for the Cross."

"I didn't do it for the Cross," I heard him answer coolly. "I'm glad we prevented those beasts getting the gun, and I couldn't leave Cotherstone to die out there. I should never have faced his father again, as long as I lived."

"Never mind your reasons," Hood said warmly. "They don't lessen your heroism, whatever they were."

Creyke came round to us then, and asked if he could help in any way.

"Lend me a penknife," answered the doctor.

"O, by Jove, I've left it behind me," he said, in a disgusted tone. "I'll run and fetch it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," put in Hood imperatively.

"But it's the only one I have, sir," returned Creyke mildly.

"I forbid you to go; I distinctly forbid it."

"O, I must go, sir," he said quietly. "I sha'n't be a minute." And he did so, returning in a few minutes breathless, but unscathed. "Here's your knife, doctor," he said, as coolly as if he had fetched it out of the hospital.

"Now, sir," I heard Hood say sternly—I could only just hear him, for they were trying to move me, and I was turning very sick and faint again—"you have chosen to disobey my orders, therefore I shall not recommend you for the Cross. It is given for valour, not for foolhardiness."

"And that was how Creyke missed the V.C.," he ended.

"And what became of her?" Mrs. Cotherstone asked, wiping away her tears, which had been falling plentifully during the recital.

'The last time I heard of her, she was still living with the Cornwallises; and I fancy she would have yielded to Creyke's prayers, only she promised Gurney just at the last that she would meet him in heaven, Floss Bannister still. Of course you know, Mary, I don't mean that she has forgotten him; but perhaps she might have been induced to let Creyke care for her, but for the promise.'

'And Major Creyke?'

'Creyke! O, there will never be any one like her for him. He will love her all his life, as he will never love any human being. I wonder I never told you all this before, darling. I am afraid I've been so happy myself that I have never thought of other people's troubles; and somehow, I don't care to look back to the time when I had not found you again.'

Mrs. Cotherstone put her soft hand into her husband's with a most tender smile upon her fair face. 'I hope I may meet her some day, Ned,' she said earnestly. 'I should like to see the woman who saved your life for me; and as for Major Creyke—Ah, now I think I shall never be able to make enough of him.'

'Only don't make me jealous,' he interposed.

'And how was it,' she asked presently, 'that you came back to the Cuirassiers?'

'My darling, at heart we were only volunteers—at least, that is to say, our interests and pride were all centred in the old regiment. We always looked upon ourselves as Cuirassiers; and as soon as I had a chance of a troop in the old regiment, I took it. The Cornwallises had left then, for the Colonel was too badly wounded to be fit for service again; and as Floss Bannister was gone, Creyke exchanged at once, though he lost ever so much seniority by doing so.'

'Will he ever marry, do you think?'

'Floss would not have him.'

'Ah, but I meant any one else. Men do such things, you know, Ned.'

'Do you think I could ever have married any one but yourself?' he asked.

'Of course not,' she replied indignantly.

'Well, then, I don't think Creyke will either.'

## THE NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE.

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In the next session of Parliament, after the totalling of the election, and probably during the first weeks of the new legislative assembly, provision will have to be made for the decennial counting of heads throughout Great Britain and Ireland. Next year a more or less complete census of the population will be taken, in accordance with the enactment which first came into force under Mr. Pitt's Administration in 1801.

It might very well be asked whether such a census will much longer be necessary under the system of registration which for the last few years has been made increasingly close and definite; but it is obvious that in order to obtain an accurate survey of relative ages, conditions, class of habitations, and other particulars of the population of the kingdom at stated periods, a system of district enumeration is more prompt and, in some important respects, more efficient than any results which could be secured by a tedious compilation and comparison of parish and official registers of births, deaths, and marriages. As a matter of fact, however, the institution of a decennial census came into operation more than a quarter of a century before any complete and general system of registration was established; for though parochial and non-parochial, official and non-official registrars of baptisms, marriages, and deaths were appointed or permitted from the times usually known as the Middle Ages, when the monastic records of the principal people of

the district were kept in the *scriptorium* of the monastery, no regular plan of civil registration was adopted until in 1833 a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into and report on the state of parish registers, and on a general system for registering births, marriages, and deaths in England and Wales. Curiously enough, the most complete of the earliest records (next to the monastic entries made in missals and devotional books) were those of the refugees who escaped from religious persecution and settled in England, forming communities of their own. Forbidden in France to celebrate marriages, or to have their children baptised, except in Roman Catholic churches, their own 'temples' being desecrated and destroyed, the *émigrés* took particular care to preserve the registers of marriage and baptism in the numerous churches which they founded in England. Dating from the records of the community of Walloons at the church of St. Julien at Southampton in 1567 to those of the various French and Dutch chapels in Soho, Hoxton, and Spitalfields at the end of the last century, a large number of such memorials came into the possession of the Registrar-General in 1833, along with those of the Society of Friends, which alone amount to above 1600 volumes, in which the entries are so accurately made as to represent the succession of the members of that body from a period about fifty years after the first organisation of the followers

of George Fox, and the formation of the 'Quakers' into a recognised sect. These early records, often containing full particulars, properly attested, and evidently in many cases accompanied by proper certificates, were of the utmost importance to people who might have sought in vain for legal registration at a time when the civil and the parochial registration were alike imperfect and uncertain.

Other nonconforming bodies followed the example of the French Protestants and the 'Friends' by keeping more or less accurate memoranda made by their officiating ministers. Parochial registration, which began after the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII., was ordered to be continued in the various churches, and was partially supplemented by an Act of the Commonwealth appointing a civil registrar to be elected by the inhabitants in every parish; but the entries, except those of marriage, were not properly attested; and at the Restoration the whole charge of registration was again placed in the hands of the clergy, many of whom made use of the books for chronicling all kinds of local occurrences, a practice which would have been not only excusable, but even commendable from one point of view, if registers themselves had been regularly and intelligibly kept. But these clerical gossipers often forgot to enter the full particulars and dates of births, marriages, and deaths in their ambition to record extraordinary harvests, executions of murderers, strange discoveries, and such matters as are now found in those paragraphs of modern newspapers which in the dull season amuse the world with announcements of the growth of enormous gooseberries or references to showers of frogs. Worse than this, however, the registration-

books were frequently open to all kinds of depredation, and were even lent to the friends or acquaintances of the parson or the clerk, while the older volumes were actually used as waste-paper. A clergyman of the good old sporting school found the vellum leaves admirably adapted for conversion into labels for the game which he consigned to his acquaintances in London; while a sartorial parish clerk discovered that the leaves were convenient for cutting into strips to be used for measures. It was even declared that some of the parchments, which might have been inscribed with the most important evidence for securing the succession to estates, were made into stiffeners for fancy articles of needlework like kettle-holders, or were converted into handy sheets whereon to inscribe patterns for lace or embroidery. Between the careless custodians and the negligent recorders, who frequently made a mere abbreviated memorandum of marriage or baptism with the stump of a pencil on the back of a letter, and afterwards forgot to enter even these meagre particulars in the book after they had obtained their clerk's fee, the whole registration of the country was in a condition to call for a sweeping reform. The attempt to change the entire system began with a Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed in 1833; but after a multitude of witnesses had been examined and the amazing story of negligence had been confirmed by evidence which filled a number of Blue-books, it was found that the whole plan of registration must be confined to civil instead of ecclesiastical authority; and in 1836 Lord John Russell introduced the Bill which came into operation in the following year, prescribing

proper forms of registry, attestation, and certificates, and securing the safe custody of future registers in local registration offices, while authenticated copies were to be deposited in an office in London. Since this time births and deaths have been registered by the Civil officers; and though the clergy of the church keep a record of marriages, a duplicate is retained by the officer of the registrar, and a wedding may now take place at the registrar's office, where it becomes a legalised civil contract.

It may be well to call the attention of future novelists and dramatists to the date at which the present system came into operation, since in case of any revival of the admirable expedient by which the villain of romance or tragedy temporarily triumphs in the falsification or destruction of a parish register, and the deposition of the rightful heir, it is desirable that the plot should be cast anterior to 1833. Whether any ingenious writer of fiction has ever founded a sensational episode on a false representation made to a census enumerator is doubtful; but it is by no means certain that such an event might not supply a striking incident. That evasions and misdirections have been practised in these matters ever since the time when William III. ordained a tax upon bachelors and widowers for five years, for the purpose of carrying on the war with France, admits of no dispute, and the records of the census of the eight decades now nearly past contain some particulars to which a delicate and paternal government has not thought it necessary to affix names, but which are significant of the peculiar difficulties that beset the conscientious officer.

It is to be remarked that in the first census, and in that of 1811,

no account was taken of the ages of the population, and in 1821 the statement of ages was left optional. In 1831 the number of males of twenty years and upwards was required; in 1841 this inquiry became closer, and then there was a revolt in the female heart, and, for aught we know, in many a male heart also. Another cause of anxiety was a suspicion that the ages of men were required in order that those within certain limits might be 'drawn for the militia,' and it is probable that many omissions were made on this account by some members of the family contriving not to be at home on the night to which the census return was applicable. But though on the last census night, that of Palm Sunday, 1871, the 32,606 enumerators were ready to make up above five million schedules from that number of families and lodgers living in 4,259,032 houses in every shire in England and Wales, it may be concluded that the 22,704,108 souls included in the returns represented pretty well the entire population. Certainly there were people who, objecting to the personal scrutiny of the enumerators (a rather 'fishy' kind of officers, necessarily selected from a host of candidates willing to earn about five shillings a day by rather harassing work), sent their schedules privately to the Registrar-General with his permission. There was the wealthy spinster of advanced age, who barred up the doors and windows of her house in the country, defied the inquisitor, declared her determination to be fined 20*l.* rather than reply to his impertinent inquiries, and finally was soothed by a letter and sent particulars to the Registrar. There was the gentleman of property who was willing to undergo any penalty

'rather than commit the crime for which David suffered,' and whose religious scruples were respected, especially as the enumerator obtained all the information he required, probably at the nearest ale-house. There were the people who showed fight and ejected the obnoxious inquirer and were fined. There was the gentleman who neither knew his own age nor that of his child, and declined to commit perjury by making a guess at either; and there was the humorous gentleman described as an 'author,' who quoted the 'opinion of his wife' in the last column of his schedule, and put himself down as 'both idiot and lunatic.' But on the whole the returns were doubtless a truthful representation of the age, condition, and number of the people.

Should any writer of works of imagination be inclined to found a romance upon the night of the census in 1881, he will find no more wonderful story than that narrated from the schedules themselves; coming, as they will, not only from remote shires, country villages, lonesome moors with a few scattered cottages, wide wolds with huts dotted here and there, sleepy cathedral towns, cosy homesteads, vast centres of industry amidst factories and furnaces, barracks, boats, ships, and barges on rivers, workhouses, jails, hospitals, and even from amidst the homeless and the destitute brought to some kind of local habitation and name on that one night of all the year. Will the returns give us any particulars of girls and

boys at Board schools, as well as vagrant children and juvenile criminals—small integers in the great sum of national life?

Here in the great centre of it all, this mighty city, the story culminates, though in its midst, in the City itself (so called), the population, estimated by its nightly number, diminishes year by year as the suburbs increase. The enumerated population of London on the night of April 2d, 1871, was 3,251,804, but this was only the Registration district; and in the Metropolitan and City Police division, including a ring of 12 to 15 miles round Charing Cross, the numbers were 3,883,092, while another outer ring contained 631,288. These figures represent an increase respectively of 1·88, 1·49, and 4·19 per cent per annum from 1861 to 1871; and the marvel will probably be repeated in the next report of the Registrar-General, who may well rise to enthusiasm, and make an official return the occasion for an exulting reference when he says 'to the eye from Holwood in the south near the source of the Ravensbourne, and to the ruins of an old Roman city, the dome of St. Paul's and a thin cloud of smoke are almost the sole signs of the millions living along the valley of the Thames'; and that 'looked at in any light, the magnitude and growth of London are marvellous, and the causes invite the careful scrutiny for which the subsequent analysis of the facts collected at the census will serve as material.'

## OUR LONDON NOTE-BOOK.

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THE remarkable success which attended the production of Mrs. Brassey's simple and charming narrative of her voyage round the world in the *Sunbeam* has induced her to make public other records of her travels. In her latest book, *Sunshine and Storm in the East*, she gives, by way of contrast, the story of two different visits to the Mediterranean—the one in 1874, the other in 1878. The title of the book is to be taken not literally, but metaphorically; and I certainly cannot congratulate Mrs. Brassey upon its aptness, any more than I can congratulate M. Gustave Doré on the enigmatical design which renders the cover of the volume striking indeed, but eminently unsightly. The first portion of the book, written, as it was, before the *Voyage in the Sunbeam*, and also previous to the stirring events which have caused so many changes in the East, takes but a feeble hold upon the reader's interest, though it is lightly and pleasantly written. It is the second portion, narrating the authoress's visit to Cyprus and Constantinople in 1878, that naturally attracts one's attention most. Of Cyprus Mrs. Brassey gives a depressing account, which will no doubt please those who, for party reasons, inveigh against the policy which annexed that island, but will only sadden the general reader. However, it is not my intention to criticise Mrs. Brassey's pleasing pages seriously, but to give some idea of their contents.

Here, now, is a humorous incident which I am sure will provoke a smile: 'On the summit [of Mount Athos] there is the strictest monastery in the world. Not a female animal of any kind is allowed within miles, so that the monks have to do without milk or fresh eggs even, and travellers are not allowed to carry even *dead hens* on their saddles for provision. A few years ago two English ladies landed here from a yacht. As most of the men here wear petticoats and the women trousers, and the monks have not much experience in such matters, they did not discover the sacrilege that had been committed for some time; and then you may imagine their horror and disgust, and the penances they had to perform, poor things!'

The monks of Mount Athos may well be excused for not being able to distinguish females from males by their attire, seeing that even the practised eyes of men and women of the world are liable to be deceived sometimes. In proof of this I may recall an incident which actually happened four years ago to my knowledge, and I have a faint idea that it has since done duty in one of the comic journals. I will put it dramatically. Scene: Ladies' waiting-room at railway-station. Enter young lady in the ulster and 'pot-hat' of the period, with really no distinguishing mark of sex about her. Great commotion amongst knot of middle-aged

ladies at the other end of the room. At last one is deputed to act as spokeswoman, who walks up to the intruder, and with severe indignation exclaims, 'I don't know whether you are aware of it or not, sir, but this is a *ladies' waiting-room!*' Amusement of intruder, fuss of middle-aged ladies, theatrical unbuttoning of ulster, explanation, apologies. *Tableau.* With that scene in my mind, I confess to feeling little surprise at the mistake made by these unsophisticated recluses.

Perhaps the most interesting passages in Mrs. Brassey's book are those which tell of her visits to the harems, and of the impressions produced. The ladies of the East are no longer the poor spiritless creatures they used to be. They have begun to rebel against the tyranny of the despotic lords of creation; and we shall certainly hear at no very distant date of a revolution in the seraglios, and of a general strike for freedom amongst the women. Even so far back as 1874 Mrs. Brassey observes that 'the thin end of the wedge is in already; and, in spite of the Sultan Valideh's edicts, the yashmaks get thinner and thinner every day, till in many cases they are little more than a tulle veil. The broughams containing the ladies from the harems draw up by the mosques of Bymzel at Mashleck, or the gardens at Chumleyah, the negroes and eunuchs discreetly turn their backs, and a good deal of flirting and sign-making goes on.' The children of the present day in Turkey, Mrs. Brassey assures us, are brought up to think the system of yashmaks and confinement a most tyrannical custom and not to be endured. Fuad Pasha, who accompanied the Sultan to England and Paris in 1867, was stoutly in favour of

the freedom of women, and declared, in a memorable speech on a public occasion, 'that Turkey would never take its proper place till the walls between the men's apartments and the harem were broken down, and the softening and purifying influence of women was allowed to be felt.' One Turkish lady of spirit said to Mrs. Brassey, 'Though my husband is not so very particular himself, I don't believe he will ever do anything to emancipate us or get us places at the theatre. They are all alike—such *Turks!*—and are too glad of an excuse to go out alone and enjoy themselves.' I think, by the way, that I can sometimes hear that charge brought against Western husbands also!

These were Mrs. Brassey's experiences of harem life in 1874. In 1878 she writes: 'The last four years seem to have added greatly to the amount of liberty they enjoy. They are now much less particular about seeing gentlemen. . . . A few months ago Princess Nazli went to Egypt, and was not allowed to return to Constantinople. She put on a thick yashmak and feridjee, borrowed 1000 francs, and travelled back with her English maid. As soon as they had made a clear start they threw off yashmak and feridjee, and travelled as two English ladies, until they reached Constantinople, where they again assumed the Oriental costume. Within comparatively recent years such a proceeding on the part of a Turkish lady would have been rewarded by the bowstring, the sack, and the Bosphorus. Not so very long ago, 600 women of the Imperial harem actually suffered this fate, their bodies being sunk in sacks in the Gulf of Ismiel, close to where our fleet has been lying recently.'

These fair ladies of the harem evidently intend to assert their rights forcibly, and it is clear that their emancipation cannot long be delayed. Mrs. Brassey herself may probably have more effect in bringing about the revolution than she imagines. For the sight of her enjoying such perfect freedom, wandering in that delightful fashion over the world with her husband and children, must have stirred their envy and made them more bitterly discontented with their own lot than ever. Before another decade closes, who knows, we may have some Turkish lady following Mrs. Brassey's example—sailing round the globe in her yacht, and recording her impressions of the world, so long hidden from her, in a book as bright, as pleasant, and as entertaining as *Sunshine and Storm in the East*.

That a second edition should be exhausted, and that French and German translations of Mr. T. H. S. Escott's work on contemporary England—*England; its People, Polity, and Pursuits*—should be forthcoming, sufficiently attests the success of the work, and proves the reality of the want which it has supplied. These two volumes give a clear account, not only of contemporary institutions, but of contemporary tastes, fashions, and occupations. Accuracy of statement is combined with popularity of treatment; and if the writing is easy, its easiness is not of the kind which makes difficult reading. The book can scarcely be better described than by saying that it tells one what every well-informed person ought to know, and what very few people, as a matter of fact, do. It is not a history, but a series of nineteenth-century pictures; not an encyclopaedia, but a survey. It is a book to be bought, and to be kept in a

handy position on one's library-shelves; but it is one which is something more than a work of reference. Its chapters and its parts are closely connected, and strictly continuous in their interest and their argument. Mr. Escott works up from the particular to the general, from the individual citizen to the mighty aggregate of the British empire. He commences with the English village, and he ends with that larger England which lies beyond the seas. He propounds no abstract propositions, but gives us concrete facts, picturesque sketches, graphic descriptions. England at work and England at play; towns of business and towns of pleasure; politics and society; clubs and drawing-rooms; art and literature; music and science; the business and organisation of law, finance, education, local government,—these are some of Mr. Escott's central themes. The work is well planned and well executed. What the author's opinions are on the different topics of the day—political, industrial, and religious—is suggested rather than obtrusively expressed, yet suggested with just enough of definiteness to give a pleasant flavour of individuality to the whole. The book has now run the gauntlet of the whole British and American press, and it is to the infinite credit of Mr. Escott that his reviewers should have failed to detect any single serious misstatement in these two volumes. This of course is mainly due to the fact that our author has had the good sense to submit every chapter containing controversial matter or complex statements to recognised experts, whose names are given in the preface.

I have not for a long time read any correspondence that has interested and amused me so much

as that of the late Mr. Macvey Napier, recently published. Mr. Napier edited the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and succeeded Jeffrey in the editorship of the *Edinburgh Review*, a post which he filled from 1829 till the year of his death, 1847. The selected correspondence which his son has given to the world contains letters from the best-known literary men of the century : Carlyle, Chalmers, Macaulay, Hallam, Brougham, Bulwer Lytton, Jeffrey, James Stephen, Thackeray, Dickens, G. H. Lewes, Lord John Russell, and a host of other familiar names. The most entertaining feature of these letters is the outspoken criticism upon their fellow contributors in which the writers for the *Edinburgh* indulge when corresponding with the editor of the *Review*. For example, Lord Cockburn writes of Macaulay, 'I think the brilliancy of his style, especially on historical subjects, the worst thing about him. Delighting, as I always do, in his thoughts, views, and knowledge, I feel too often compelled to curse and roar at his words and the structure of his composition. As a corruptor of style he is more dangerous to the young than Gibbon. His seductive power greater, his defects worse.'

In a letter of considerable length Dickens gives his views on the 'punishment of death,' on which he purposed writing an article for the *Review*. He states it as his opinion that the punishment of death has a 'horrible fascination for many of those persons who render themselves liable to it,' and that 'it produces crime in the criminally disposed, and engenders a diseased sympathy—morbid and bad, but natural and often irresistible—among the well

conducted and gentle.' And he proposes discussing the questions, 'whether it be for the benefit of society to elevate even this crime to the awful dignity and notoriety of death, and whether it would not be much more to its advantage to substitute a mean and shameful punishment, degrading the deed and the committer of the deed, and leaving the general compassion to expend itself upon the only theme at present quite forgotten in the history, that is to say, the murdered person.' Unfortunately Dickens was never able to find time to write his proposed article, and I do not know that any one else has ever ventilated that view of the subject—a very suggestive and important view in my opinion.

I do not know who Mr. Richard Ford may have been, but he appears to have written an article in the *Edinburgh* on Borrow's *Bible in Spain*; and in a subsequent letter to Napier, he writes, 'You, like many, nay most, somewhat distrust Borrow. I who know him and the country believe his work to be a true honest transcript. He is half gipsy, half jockey, and half Methodist; but as he really writes down *himself* exactly as the fit is on him, the world, crediting his worser portion, disbelieves his better. He is one of the most extraordinary mortals in person and habits that ever crossed my path; his conversation and his private letters are nothing but pages of his book.' Now I too know something of George Borrow personally. I have enjoyed his society, and listened for hours to his original and fascinating conversation; but the impression left upon me by that intercourse is very different from that left upon Mr. Ford. George Borrow I will

admit to be 'half gipsy,' that goes without saying ; but 'half jockey,' nothing could convey a more erroneous idea of the man except, perhaps, the term 'half Methodist.' Borrow had a keen eye for horse-flesh, and was passionately fond of a wild gallop on a thoroughbred ; but when I call up to my mind his tall, massive, colossal figure, his keen piercing dark eyes, his fine striking features, I am irritated at the epithet 'half jockey.' And as to 'half Methodist,' who that ever met George Borrow would dream of applying such a term to so fearless and independent a thinker and speaker. I daresay the editor of these letters is not aware that George Borrow is still living. I saw him not long ago at the British Museum, an old man now ; the straight back and broad shoulders bent woefully beneath the burden of his fourscore years ; the firm determined stride dwindled now into a feeble shuffle ; but something of the old fire and the dark bright eyes yet. He was one of the finest-looking men physically I ever saw. There is hardly a man living, I suppose, whose career has been more remarkable and adventurous than his ; and his books have a peculiar charm, both of style and thought, which should render them far more widely read than they are.

It is told of a now famous Prussian general that, when his opinion that England was no longer safe from invasion was sneered at by certain Englishmen in his presence, he laughingly said, 'But we have already invaded your country. There are some hundreds of thousands of us there already. They are mostly drilled soldiers. They are all bound to serve the Fatherland. We have only to supply them with arms ;

and, look you, there is a great hostile army in your midst, and the invasion of England by the Germans is a *fait accompli* before you know where you are.' I do not think we need view this invasion with any apprehension. Indeed, if it comes to that, there is, I suppose, no other country in the world which has suffered and still suffers so many irruptions of foreign invaders as our own. Not the least interesting among these peaceful invaders of our shores are those young gentlemen from Japan, of whom we have some hundreds in our midst, and who, inspite of their close imitation of European dress, are easily detected by their pronounced Mongolian features. I have met some of these young Japanese from time to time, and been struck with their intelligence and good-manners. But it is not easy to get from them much information about their own country. I fancy the reticence on this point must be the result of strict injunctions from the home authorities, at whose instance they are sent over here to study. I confess to a deep interest in Japan ; and I have good reason to believe that this feeling of interest is pretty general throughout England. That being so, I am sure any book which throws light upon the home-life of the Japanese will be eagerly read. Such a book I have just been perusing. Not a ponderous book of travels, you must understand, but a racy, lively, amusing sketch of Japanese society. The said sketch is embodied in Mr. Mounteney Jephson's novel, *A Pink Wedding*. Readers of *London Society* do not need to be told with what spirit and 'go' Mr. Jephson writes ; but in addition to the usual attractions of his stories, *A Pink Wedding* has the merit of containing the

most humorous, graphic, and entertaining pictures of Japan and the Japanese which have yet been published in this country. For that reason, if for no other, the book is well worth reading.

There is a passage in Mr. Jephson's book which brings us back to George Borrow again, for it suggests to me the possible realisation of an idea of his. When last I met him (*ehen, fugaces labuntur anni!*), some twenty years ago or more, his hobby was China and the Chinese. He had just mastered the language, and he expressed his firm conviction that the Chinese are destined to be the ruling race of the world. In support of this view he pointed to the extraordinary manner in which they were spreading themselves over the world. In America and Australia they swarm. Wherever they go they cheapen labour. They are content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. In that way they insert the thin end of the wedge; and finally, when they have monopolised all the labour of the world, they will suddenly rise some day in their millions upon their indolent and enervated masters, and crush them under foot. That prospect, I admit, seems to me somewhat remote at present, so far at all events as Europe is concerned; for John Chinaman has not made his appearance in any force here yet. Perhaps the labour-market is not now ready for him. There was talk, some little time ago, of starting a gigantic laundry in Kensington, to be worked entirely by Chinese laundrymen—the most skilful exponents of the art of washing in the world. But apparently the scheme has collapsed, for I have heard nothing more of it. That would have been the first encouragement to John China-

man to invade our labour-market. Failing this, I would suggest another opening for Celestial enterprise in England. That is the waiter business. I am indebted to Mr. Jephson for the idea. Listen to his description of Chinese waiters, and I am sure you will agree with me that the idea is worth developing.

'These China boys,' writes Mr. Jephson, 'when properly looked after, as they are in the leading mercantile houses in China and Japan, are the perfection of waiters. Dressed in a loose flowing garment of pale-blue silk, knickerbocker-like articles of the same hue and material, white-silk continuations, half-gaiters, half-stockings, gartered with sashes of pale-blue silk, and wearing embroidered shoes, with paper soles three-quarters of an inch thick, the China boy stands behind his master's chair, picturesque, clean, and attentive. In his paper-soled shoes he goes about as noiselessly as a mouse, and all you see of him, as he places your plate, or hands you a dish, are his taper clever-looking fingers: a trifle long in the nail, perhaps, are these same fingers; but as these appendages are invariably well kept, this is of no consequence, and is at any rate better than the nail-bitten thumb of a European waiter.'

To be well waited upon is one of the most delightful luxuries of civilised life. The ideal banquet of the Sybarite is only realised when there are perfect waiters, whose presence is never obtruded upon the guest, because they seem but the invisible ministers to his unspoken desires. Yet who is there who can boast of possessing such a treasure? The nearest approach to a perfect waiter I have met with has been an intelligent

and well-drilled English servant. I like not your French, Italian, or German waiter, though, perhaps, the average of excellence is higher among these than among those of our own race, which supplies the two extremes, the few best and the many worst waiters in the world. Of all nationalities commend me to the Irish for the most execrable specimens of the *genus* waiter. But these Chinese boys, as described by Mr. Jephson, seem to me to come nearer the *beau-ideal* of a waiter than anything we have at present in Europe. What bold speculator will import some of them? I should have no objection whatever to seeing the 'Heathen Chinee' introduced into England, in any or every branch of domestic service. He is an excellent cook, a superb laundryman, and a perfect waiter. He asks for far less wages than we pay our incompetent native article. Then why not give him a chance of solving for us that perplexing domestic problem: 'What are we to do for our servants?'

At the beginning of the present century there were some very curious notions about France and Frenchmen prevalent among the uneducated classes in England. The prejudice against foreigners was very strong; indeed they were hardly admitted to be human beings like ourselves, and the idea of their being Christians was scouted as absurd. Dean Ramsay tells a story of an old Scotch lady who piously attributed the success of the British troops in the Peninsular war to the fact that we were 'a prayin' people'; and when it was hinted to her that perhaps the French also prayed, she retorted disdainfully, 'Hoot! the jabberin' bodies, wha could unnerstan' them?' Readers of *Adam Bede*—

and who has not read that masterpiece of fiction?—will remember the sage remarks of Mr. Craig, the gardener, upon the French, remarks which were accepted by his hearers as gospel, and, indeed, embodied the belief of the bulk of Englishmen in that day. 'Why it's a sure thing,' said that dogmatic Scotchman; 'and there's them 'ull bear witness to 't—as if one regiment when there was one man a-missing, they put the regiments on a big monkey, and they fit him as the shell fits the walnut, and you couldn't tell the monkey from the mounseers.' But since then we have purged ourselves of a good deal of our stupid insular prejudice; we no longer pride ourselves on our ignorance of continental manners and customs, and you will find that most Englishmen have a tolerably correct idea of the fashions and habits of Frenchmen. The converse, however, strange to say, is not true of our neighbours. The French—even those of the better class—are extraordinarily ignorant of all that pertains to English social life. They still regard us socially as only half-civilised, and are ready to believe any monstrous cock-and-bull story of English eccentricity which their imaginative journalists foist upon them. There are London correspondents of the French journals who deliberately foster these grotesque ideas, and with the most barefaced impudence coin stories to illustrate the popular theory of English society. They do so, I suppose, because they know the readers for whom they cater would not believe them if they took any other view of the humours of English life.

But not even this poor excuse can be alleged in extenuation of the preposterously absurd mis-

statements made by grave and accomplished *littérateurs*. The Abbé Vidieu, whose work on divorce M. Alexandre Dumas fils has just endeavoured with such serious elaboration to refute, tells his readers that it is still a common sight to see the squares of London on certain days filled with coarse and ribald crowds assembled to witness *the sale of wives by their husbands by public auction!* He describes these miserable women in touching language, which must have brought tears to the eyes of his French readers. He dwells upon their downcast eyes and their dejected air, as, each with a rope round her neck, the end of which her husband holds, they stand there waiting to be bargained for and sold ! This relic of savage barbarism, the abbé says, is the result of the adoption by England of the hateful doctrines of the Lutheran Reformation ! And yet these are the people who talk of 'insular prejudice' and the 'stupid ignorance' of our benighted islanders ! Well, well, we must put up with it ; 'our lively neighbour the Gaul' is not a bad creature in his way ; but he is vain, vain to the verge of sublimity. It pleases his vanity to contrast himself favourably with *ces barbares Anglais*. He feels morally elevated by the contrast. It might be dangerous to rob him of this pleasing illusion. He is nothing if not conceited ; let us leave him to enjoy his conceit unmolested. We can laugh heartily at him to ourselves ; what matter that he does not hear our cachinnations, and is unconscious of our ridicule !

The taste for pictures seems to increase every year. Not a season passes in London now which does not witness the opening of two or three new picture-galleries, or at

least exhibitions of pictures ; and such shows must presumably pay, or else there would not be so many of them. New Bond-street swarms with so-called 'Fine Art Exhibitions,' some permanent, some ephemeral, but all apparently well patronised by the public, from which fact I gather that a popular interest in art has been awakened, and is being daily developed. Already two new claimants for favour and patronage during the season of 1880 are in the field—the *Graphic* Gallery and the Dramatic Fine Art Gallery. I have visited both, and will therefore note my impressions for the benefit of my readers. The *Graphic* Gallery is a modest little exhibition, started by the proprietors of the *Graphic* with the object of benefiting the funds of two excellent charities for the relief of distressed artists. I went there with the expectation of finding a few idle gazers sauntering about, but to my amazement found the small room crowded. I had to attach myself to the end of a *queue* of visitors, and resign myself patiently to my fate. And it was a severe trial of patience, I must admit. The great attraction of course is the group of a dozen pictures, in which twelve well-known artists have given specimens of their ideal of feminine beauty. The pictures are ranged in a semi-circle, each on an easel, with the backs to the entrance, so that the stream of sight-seers has to slowly file round in procession. The promoters of the exhibition, of course, never dreamt that it would be so popular, or else they would have taken a larger and more commodious room.

I cannot say I was dazzled by the galaxy of beauty presented to my gaze ; indeed it is impossible to suppose for a moment that any

one of the artists represented ever seriously intended the work here exhibited to be taken as his ideal of feminine beauty. There is hardly one of the faces that deserves to be termed beautiful. They do not rise above prettiness, and there is a singular absence of spirituality and intellect in all of them. But, perhaps, artists generally are of Clive Newcome's opinion, that beautiful women ought to be stupid. 'Give me,' said that accomplished critic of womanhood, 'a calm woman, a slow woman, a lazy majestic woman. Show me a gracious virgin bearing a lily, not a leering giggler frisking a rattle. A lively woman would be the death of me.... About great beauty there should always reign a silence.... To be beautiful is enough. If a woman can do that, well; who shall demand more from her? You don't want a rose to sing? And I think wit is out of place when there is great beauty.' The exhibitors at the *Graphic* Gallery seem to be of Clive Newcome's opinion, an opinion with which I must admit that I do not wholly agree. The three most pleasing faces, to my mind, are those of Mr. Lealie, Mr. Storey, and Mr. Perugini, which stand side by side. They differ widely, but each of them is fair enough and sweet enough to steal a man's heart from him. Mr. Alma Tadema with proper marital chivalry has chosen his wife as his ideal; but I have seen that handsome lady to much better advantage in some of Mr. Tadema's other pictures, notably 'The Sculpture Gallery.' Mr. Long gives us a solemn sensuous Egyptian beauty, of the type that Clive Newcome would have admired. The flesh-tints are finely painted, and as a work of art this seems to me the best of the group; but, owing to the smallness of the room, one is

forced to view it at too short a distance to allow of its due effect being realised. Mr. Tissot's beauty is a very lively young lady, a charming companion I am sure, though her nose is 'tip-tilted like the petal of a flower,' and the lines of her mouth are most perversely irregular. For my own part, I would rather cast in my lot with the owner of that arch smile and those merry eyes and that coquettish mouth than with Mr. Dicksee's sage-green damsel with manifest yearnings after 'the higher life'; or Mr. Hopkins's *mulier dolorosa* with the 'lidded eyes,' who looks as if she had just been indulging in that truly feminine luxury, 'a good cry'; or Mr. Calderon's perky young woman in *déshabillé*; or Mr. Marcus Stone's lackadaisical seaside *belle*; or Sir Frederick Leighton's skimpily and attenuated blonde. But the gem of the exhibition is Mr. Millais's 'Cherry Ripe.' I lost my heart straightway to that little maiden of seven, than whom, I make bold to say, the artist has given us no more beautiful and charming child-study.

The Dramatic Fine Art Gallery is not, on its merits, a very noteworthy exhibition, though the *Athenaeum* is hardly fair in terming it 'a chaos of indescribable rubbish'; but it has an interest, apart from its artistic phases, which will doubtless attract to it many visitors. The exhibition is confined to portraits of actors and paintings by actors. For the most part the works contributed are the fruit of the leisure hours of actors and actresses, who have a taste for pictorial art, and have cultivated that taste with praiseworthy assiduity. There are, of course, the marks of amateurishness everywhere in the collection; but it is evident that these ama-

teurs have pursued their pastime with far more vigour and enthusiasm, with far more careful study and conscientious attention to detail, than most amateur dabblers in painting. Some of the smaller and less ambitious contributions are really clever. In the larger and more pretentious canvases the defects are of course more glaring; but even here there are pictures which would pass muster at an ordinary Royal Academy Exhibition. I have seen specimens of art from the brushes of professional artists at Burlington House that fell considerably short of the standard of excellence attained by, for example, Mr. George Giddens, Mr. Forbes Robertson, and Mr. F. C. Ellesman. Nor is the 'fair sect,' as one of Mr. Andrew Halliday's characters in *Checkmate* used to term that portion of humanity, unrepresented; indeed, what department of art is there in which women are not represented in our days? Mrs. Keeley, Madame Ronniger, Miss Geneviève Ward, Mrs. Wellsbourne, and Miss Ella Dietz, all prove themselves possessed of a decided talent for drawing, and a graceful taste which has evidently been assiduously cultivated.

The Dramatic Fine Art Gallery is an interesting experiment; but I cannot say that I should wish to see it repeated. It is rather an appalling prospect to look forward to, if the amateur painters in all professions should follow the example of the ladies and gentlemen of the stage—if barristers, soldiers, sailors, bankers, and even tradesmen should suddenly be seized with an insatiate craving for exhibiting their crude efforts at colouring canvas. Yet why should they not? In every profession there are amateur artists, whose

pictures would, in all probability, make quite as good a show as those of actors and actresses. I have gazed with mingled wonder and admiration at the pictorial achievements of that eminent member of the prize-ring, Jem Ward, and have been deeply interested in watching the ex-Champion of England plying the brush so deftly with those terrible 'mawleys' which had pounded into jelly the hard 'mugs' of the very best bruisers that the three kingdoms could bring against him. In looking at such productions it is not their merit as works of art that attracts our attention; but the fact that they have been produced under peculiar circumstances, and by persons whose training has been in very different pursuits. If you saw a monkey playing on the fiddle, you would not criticise the quality of the music, but be lost in wonder and admiration at the thought that the creature should be able to perform at all. These extraneous and meretricious attractions, however, are distinctly injurious to art. A picture should be judged on its merits as a picture, and on no other grounds. I sincerely hope, therefore, in the interests of art, that we shall not be flooded with exhibitions of amateur work. It is no doubt pleasant to find that, in an age when desperately hard labour is an essential of most ordinary men's existence, there should be found so many persons who devote their leisure to coqueting, more or less seriously, with the fine arts. But it is not fair that these *dilettante* students should exhibit their works cheek by jowl with the shows of professional artists, wheedle the public out of its shillings, and then claim, on the ground of being amateurs, to be exempt from the criticism dealt out to the genuine

workers in art. If the amateur is to escape from stern and rigid criticism, he must confine his displays to the private circle of his friends and acquaintances ; when he steps out of that circle and courts publicity, he must be prepared to take the consequences, and abide judgment strictly on his merits. That is the only way of checking the presumption and conceit which are too prominent features in the amateurs of the present day.

Those painted beauties, of whom I have just spoken, recall to me a *bon mot* made not long since by a well-known Q.C. and *Quarterly Reviewer* who is renowned for his atrabilious sarcasm. I will call him Mr. Wenham—Thackeray's. Mr. Wenham is the standing representative of the type of man I mean. Mr. Wenham, then, met at a ball an elderly lady remarkable for her bluntness and asperity, whom I will call (after Thackeray again) Lady Kew. ‘What do you think of my daughter to-night, Mr. Wenham?’ asked her ladyship. ‘Don’t you think she looks well?’ ‘Really, Lady Kew,’ said the satirist, with a sour smile, ‘I am not competent to pronounce an opinion. I do not profess to be a judge of *painting*; but I have no doubt competent critics will pronounce her an angel.’ ‘And pray, Mr. Wenham, have you ever seen an angel that was not painted? If not, *you* at least are never likely to see one.’

Mr. Wenham had the worst of that encounter of wits, I think; but he was happier on a subsequent and very recent occasion. Asked by a well-known member of the ‘shrieking sisterhood’ what he thought of an article by one of the ‘sisters’ on ‘Woman’s Rights,’ ‘Ah,’ said he drily, ‘you should

not ask me. You know I have always maintained that women look better in muslin than in *print*.’

I gave an instance in a previous note of the extraordinary ignorance of English manners and customs prevalent in France. But even our American cousins do not appear to have very clear notions of our habits of life. I took up a volume of the *Atlantic Monthly*, for 1879, the other day, and there I found an article upon English society the statements in which made my hair stand on end. I read with horror, for example, that flogging is the most dearly cherished privilege among parents, even mothers, of the John Bull class. My blood froze in my veins as I further read that our girls, even our marriageable girls, are regularly flogged; that the riding-whip and the birch are articles of domestic economy, without which the household would be incomplete. Then followed a description of a peer flogging his niece with his hunting-whip under circumstances of such brutality and indecency that I dare not repeat them. If a magazine of such standing as the *Atlantic Monthly* condescends to print such outrageous libels upon English society, I suppose there must be American men and women who read the rubbish, and even believe it to be true. To show how trustworthy the writer is, and how thoroughly *au fait* he is with the manners and customs of that high life in England which he undertakes to describe, I will quote the following amusing passage: ‘An American lady was visiting at a great house, where she noticed that the napkin was not used at luncheon. Being well known to her hostess, she ventured to ask her the reason. Her grace—for she was a duchess

—replied that it was ‘not the custom,’ the explanation being given, moreover, ‘with an air which signified that that settled the question.’ It happened, however, unfortunately for the duchess, that her guest had taken lunch with the Queen more than once at Balmoral, where she found that napkins were not without the countenance of Royalty. This information accordingly was imparted to the duchess, who thereupon exclaimed, ‘Indeed! The Queen had better be careful; she will make herself unpopular if she undertakes to change the customs of the country.’

*En revanche*, let me give an anecdote quite as illustrative of American manners as the foregoing is of English manners. A friend of mine was introduced the other day to a very charming young American lady at Geneva. With that *naïveté* and frankness characteristic of Yankee woman-kind, she soon informed him that she was spending her honeymoon in Europe. ‘That must be very delightful,’ exclaimed my friend. ‘Yes,’ was her reply; ‘I enjoy it immensely.’ Then it occurred to him that he had seen nothing of the lady’s husband. ‘Your husband is not here to-day, then?’ he added. He says he shall not easily forget the comical expression of amusement and surprise upon her face as she answered, with a merry laugh, ‘My husband here! Why, he is not with me! I left him in New York.’ This idea of a honeymoon is unique. I wonder if the husband was enjoying his honeymoon with equal zest on the other side of the Atlantic? Perhaps he was.

Mr. R. B. Marston (Messrs. Sampson Low & Co.) has registered a ‘happy thought’ in the form of ‘The Popular Paper Knife,’ a very useful and curious shilling’s-worth. You can cut your book or magazine with it; and on the blade, in small but clear characters, you find marked inches, centimètres, and quite an abstract of the *Post Office Guide*. Altogether it is a very handy desk companion.

A good many people drink too much, and a good many others, the doctors tell us, eat too much, particularly of animal food. In the Farringdon-road, opposite the Metropolitan Railway-station, an experiment is being tried which deserves to meet with success and to have a more central position. It is ‘The Food of Health’ Restaurant, a vegetarian establishment, where you can get soups at threepence, and ‘savouries’ at fourpence, per portion, as well as pleasant preparations of fruit on the same moderate scale. Good coffee and tea are supplied, but no intoxicants. This is another step in the wholesome dietetic non-alcoholic movement, which gains ground in London. Without discussing the vegetarian question pure and simple, there can be no doubt that a light, nourishing, well-cooked, and economical luncheon of this kind, with a cup of thoroughly good coffee, is a boon to any class. To partake hurriedly of animal food in the midst of a day of severe business strain spoils many a man’s temper, induces unhealthy lethargy, and diminishes the power for real work.

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